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Courage to care : a
study in Christian ...

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THE COURAGE TO CARE

(Be cautious with this title. Why? Courage is informed feeling & rises & falls as conditions change. Underlying courage, as the steady currents of the sea underlie its swells & waves, is the will. ∴ the will to care must be mastered so that our Xn courage will be an informed & dependable, rather than an emotional & spasmodic phenomenon. How come of this mastery of the will, & this informed courage? Harm Word of God to man; Harm of Xn & his righteousness (right-relatedness to life in its temporal & eternal fullness).

A Study in Christian Social Responsibility

By

Franklin Sherman

Arthur H. Getz, Editor

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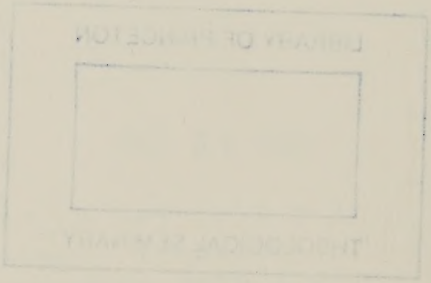

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About This Book

This text has been produced in co-operation with the Department of Social Action of the Board of Social Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America. It has also had the co-operation of the Boards of Parish Education of the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church. It is a popular study that is an outgrowth of the three-volume symposium, *Christian Social Responsibility,* edited by Harold C. Letts (Muhlenberg Press, 1957), to which the author of this book also contributed.

This book is intended for use by both teacher and students. However, a Teacher's Guide has been printed separately from the text, containing step-by-step suggestions for possible teaching procedures. The three-volume work, *Christian Social Responsibility,* should also be referred to by the teacher.

Bible references have been taken from the Revised Standard Version and are used by permission of the Division of Christian Education, N.C.C.C.U.S.A.

The author, the Rev. Franklin Sherman, is serving on the faculty of the School of Religion, State University of Iowa. He was a member of the Commission on Christian Social Responsibility of the United Lutheran Church, and formerly served as editor of *frontiers.* He has been a contributor to such publications as *Christian Century, Christianity and Crisis,* and *Lutheran World.*

It is with the hope that it will stimulate "the courage to care" about social problems that this little volume goes forth.

ARTHUR H. GETZ
Editor

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1

Troubles and Tranquilizers

"Anxious? Emotionally upset?
Suffering from mental tensions, nerves, pressure, worry?
Keep . . . Tranquilizer tablets handy.
Their use for gentle relief of nervous tension makes for calmness, relaxation, and peace of mind.
You can safely put your trust in . . .
WHEN TENSIONS RISE, TRANQUILIZE."

A GREAT DEAL OF THE SPIRIT of our age is summed up in this newspaper advertisement for tranquilizer tablets—both the troubles from which we suffer (mental tensions, nerves, pressure, worry) and the blissful state for which we yearn (calmness, relaxation, peace of mind). How many of us were willing to put our trust in pills to transport us to this goal is evidenced by the fact that in a typical year of the late 1950's more than half a billion tranquilizer tablets were manufactured, sold, and swallowed within the confines of the U.S.A. alone.

The increase in mental tensions, emotional upsets, and anxieties that is so widespread a phenomenon today is hardly surprising in view of the nature of the world in which we live. It is a revolutionary world. "What has been is what will be," says Ecclesiastes, "and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun" *(Ecclesiastes 1:9).* The writer of Ecclesiastes must have been living in a very quiet time in order to make such an observation! Our experience is the very opposite. We

can almost take for granted that what has been will not be, and the way in which things have been done by our forebears will not be adequate for our successors.

The Scientific Revolution

The scientific revolution is obvious to all of us. What will come of the current explorations of outer space, no one can tell. But these explorations represent merely the logical extension of a revolution that had already been in progress for several hundred years. It came first as a revolution in ideas, commencing at that moment when man stopped merely contemplating nature and started to investigate it. Soon investigation led to the power of manipulation, and man became nature's master rather than its slave. From that changed relationship flows the whole development of modern technology—everything from the power mower to the intercontinental ballistic missile.

That the powers of modern science might be turned to man's destruction rather than his welfare, is a fear that has grown rather than diminished with the years. For every advance made in the art of healing there has been an equal advance in the art of annihilation. The history of the twentieth century thus far gives little ground for confidence that man will learn to shun the potentialities for evil in the technology he has unleashed.

The Industrial Revolution

The industrial revolution, like the scientific revolution, has proved to have an irreversible effect. The days of homemade ice cream and handmade furniture seem to be gone forever. Mechanization has long since set in; and now the new development is automation. Perhaps the human race will prove to be super-

fluous, and, having invented both machines and machines-to-tend machines, can quietly crawl away and die without noticing the difference! To the worker whose skills already have been made obsolete by automation, this is no laughing matter.

Even the business cycle refuses any longer to obey Ecclesiastes' dictum that "what has been is what will be." Inflation and depression have always been the two phases of the cycle; but in the "recession" of 1957-58 even a drastic decline in sales, wages, and employment failed to produce a corresponding dip in prices. Some economists view this long-term inflationary trend with joy, others with alarm; but in any case there are many white-collar workers and pensioners who are caught rather uncomfortably in its grip. The opposite situation, a depression, would of course produce its own full crop of troubles and even tragedies; so that whichever way you look at it, the economic situation is a potent source of worry for the modern man.

The Social Revolution

Beyond the scientific revolution, and partially dependent on it, is the social revolution of our time. Students of society speak of the "cake of custom," the traditional pattern of behavior and belief which gives a people some sense of security in its orientation to existence. All over the world today that cake of custom is breaking up, like a gigantic ice floe that has drifted into waters that are too warm. The tribal villages of Africa are invaded by the radio, and their young men are lured into the cities, with all their strange Western ways and Western vices. The villagers of India peer down the cow-path to see nearby a steel mill belching flame. The peasants of China are forcibly uprooted from their ancestral family loyalties in order that the

new industrial and Communist society may arise. Everywhere the day of the white man's dominance is brought to an abrupt termination as nationhood is claimed by once subject peoples.

When the World Council of Churches, after its Evanston Assembly in 1954, proposed to make a study of the social conditions confronting the church in the various quarters of the earth, it is significant that the topic chosen as the one universally relevant was "Rapid Social Change." What the direction of the change might be in any given area may be questioned; but one thing is sure—the world as a whole *is* changing, rapidly and radically. This is just as true in America as elsewhere.

Urbanization

The phenomenon of urbanization alone would be enough to justify this assertion concerning our society. Urbanization, as the term implies, means the trend of population toward cities. When the United States first emerged as a nation, it was a distinctly agrarian society; there was not a single city in the thirteen colonies with a population as large as 50,000. In 1825, 75% of all workers still were employed on farms. By 1875 the proportion had dropped to 50%, and by 1955 to 10%. Today, America boasts more than one hundred cities with a population exceeding 100,000; and depending on definition, from 65 to 80% of the American people can be classified as urban.*

But urbanization means more than a reshuffling of residences. It means a change in our whole way of life. No one who has lived in both situations need be told how different is the feel of

* Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 139, 156.

life in an isolated village from that of a bustling metropolis. The one is slow and easygoing, the other fast and hard-driving. The farm, village, or small town brings one into a rather close relationship with a relatively small number of people; the city surrounds one with great hordes of fellow-workers, fellow-shoppers, fellow-citizens—but one's relationship to them is superficial and impersonal. *The Lonely Crowd* is the apt title of sociologist David Reisman's study of present-day American society. Even while rushing along with the crowd descending to the subway, and giving every appearance of purposefulness and determination, the urbanite may sometimes pause to wonder, "What am I doing here? Who are these people round about me?" He finds that he is an absolute stranger, even in the midst of the crowd.

Strangers in the midst of a crowd

It is said that during the 1958 newspaper strike in New York City the greatest shock experienced by the citizenry was seeing the faces of their fellow subway-riders for the first time when they

had no newspapers to hide behind. Conversation was virtually impossible between these creatures who had never been distinct individuals but only anonymous units occupying space. Here is a parable of our life today. We meet one another not as living and breathing, loving and suffering persons, but as objects. And perhaps, we feel, it is better thus, for if we really knew as persons those whom we meet how could we manipulate them in the way that modern urban and commercial life requires?

The Attempt to Escape

The rush to the suburbs following the Second World War reflected the desire of millions to escape the city's congestion and confusion. They were to find out, however, that crossing the city limits did not necessarily mean entering utopia. Not only were the suburbanites burdened with establishing at one fell swoop all the requirements of community life, from sewers to school boards, but they found that monotony and mass-mindedness can flourish just as well behind the shutters of the bungalow as at the top of the stairs in a city flat. There is a remarkable sameness about America's suburbs, about their houses and the families that dwell in them. It is not only a question of keeping up with the Joneses; it is also a matter of keeping down with the Smiths. No one wants to be regarded as conspicuously better or worse than his neighbors, or as being peculiar in his ideas.

It sometimes seems as though the distinction between urban and rural and small-town America is being wiped out. What does it profit a man to live ten or a hundred miles from the TV station if he watches the same programs? Youngsters on the farm are fed the same ideas, adopt the same heroes, sing the same crazy songs as their counterparts in the metropolis. The revolu-

tion in transportation and communication has made the whole world one community. The druggist in Peoria worries about the rise and fall of dictators in Pakistan.

Men's Hearts Failing Them

It is no wonder that our age has come to be known as the "age of anxiety." You may call it the machine age, or the atomic age, or the electronics age, or, anticipating somewhat, the age of interplanetary travel; but the name that has stuck is "the anxious age." Men's hearts are "failing them for fear"—quite literally, for it has now been shown that a great many heart attacks have their origins in psychological rather than physical factors. There is a vague feeling of uneasiness, an unreadiness to face the morrow, a sense of dread, as if some catastrophe were on its way. The younger generation perhaps feels the anxiety and futility of modern life most deeply of all, many either lashing out wildly at the society that it considers responsible for the mess that things are in (the world-wide phenomenon of "juvenile delinquency"), or else giving up the struggle and simply withdrawing from any effort to make sense out of life (the similarly widespread phenomenon of the "beat generation").

Worries and anxieties, it is true, have always dogged man's steps, and always will. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," as one of the so-called comforters of Job said long ago *(Job 5:7)*. But when the accustomed patterns of communal life are broken, when the social order itself falls into disorder, then man's perennial anxieties are accentuated. Normally a man has been able to count on some kind of future, in which his posterity at least, if not he himself, could enjoy the fruition of his striving. Today, in the age of H-bombs and missiles capable

of carrying them to any point on earth, even the confidence that there will be a meaningful future is gone.

The historian Arnold Toynbee has studied all of the great civilizations known to history and has noted that each of them experienced a "time of troubles" similar to that in which we ourselves are living now. The record of the ability of these civilizations to survive such a time is distinctly bad. Of the twenty-one known civilizations, in fact, twenty have already fallen by the wayside; sixteen are wholly dead; four are still living but are in an advanced state of breakdown. Need our own civilization follow in this train? Not necessarily, says Toynbee, for the answer lies not with fate but with ourselves. The situation presents us with a challenge. The question is how we shall respond. From the standpoint of a faith which discerns in history the working of a divine grace and judgment, it is God who presents us with this challenge; it is he who waits for our response.

The Courage to Care

What shall that response be? Do tranquilizer pills provide an answer? Is not this search for peace of mind at any cost precisely a withdrawal from the problem, a desire to find a pillow on which to lie and sleep it out? Tranquilizer drugs, it should be noted, were designed originally for the treatment of patients in mental hospitals (and for such purposes they no doubt are justified). Their use to alleviate everything from marital unhappiness to fear of radioactive fallout shows how much we all are mentally disturbed, how close our civilization is to a breakdown.

A young mother of three children reached such a point of "upset nerves" that her doctor prescribed a tranquilizer. Her pastor asked her how it made her feel. "As if I didn't care about

a thing in the world," she said. Later the pastor learned that the woman had stopped taking the drug, and he asked her why. "I decided that I'd rather care," she answered.

There is the point! We must find such a way of handling our problems as not to cut the root of caring. If we merely seek a way out in terms of "calmness, relaxation, and peace of mind," then we are admitting that the issues themselves—in the woman's case, the real needs of her children—are no longer worth caring about; or at least that we no longer have the courage to care. It is far from the Christian faith to acquiesce in such an abandonment of the world. Christianity claims it shows us the ground on which our neighbor's needs are infinitely worth caring about; that it gives us the *courage to care,* even in a world of revolution and anxiety. It will be our purpose in succeeding chapters to explore the basis of this Christian claim and its implications for some crucial aspects of contemporary life.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree that life in America is changing rapidly? In what way is it different than it was in your grandfather's day? Are the changes an improvement or a step backward? Explain.

2. Does the text lay too much stress on the disadvantages of city life? What are some of its advantages?

3. Do you think that the formerly colonial peoples of Asia and Africa are justified in claiming independence? What problems are they experiencing as they do so?

4. Does the prospect of being wiped out by a hydrogen bomb worry you? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think that it would matter very much to God if civilization as we know it were to come to an end through nuclear destruction in a third world war?

6. Why do "tranquilizer pills" fail to solve our social problems? How do calmness and peace of mind stand in conflict with the attitude Christianity would have us take toward our neighbors' needs and problems?

2

The Christian Dynamic

THE STATEMENT THAT CHRISTIANITY provides an alternative to the current trust in tranquilizers would be met with scorn by many. "As a matter of fact," they would ask, "isn't Christianity itself the greatest tranquilizer?"

This seems to be what Karl Marx, father of Communism, had in mind when he called religion "the opiate of the people." A pipeful of opium has the power of producing marvelous dreams. While under the influence of the drug the addict may experience, mentally, great delights. But then comes the awakening to bitter reality again, and the discovery that one's problems and frustrations are just as they were before. Christianity, said Marx, is the poor man's opiate; its dreams of a glorious life to come are no more substantial than those of the deluded addict.

Worldliness and Otherworldliness

If we examine the history of Christianity we find that there are some grounds for such an accusation. Christianity has frequently been characterized by otherworldliness. Believers have sometimes concentrated their attention so intensely on the world to come that they have had little interest or energy for the life of this present world. Their longing for the heavenly Jerusalem (which is surely in itself legitimate) effaced their sense of participation in the earthly city. Actually, however, Christians could never remove themselves, except by death, from their involve-

ment in life's basic spheres of marriage and family, work and leisure, art and politics. Concentration on the future or on the purely inward life has only meant that the basic realms of present existence were surrendered to secular ideas and forces.

We, today, could hardly be accused of otherworldliness. We are much too addicted to our deep-freezes and automatic dishwashers and all the other comforts of this present life which modern technology has made available. But we have our own way of distorting Christianity. We make it a device to serve our own private ends. "Whatever a man wants, he can get it if he really works for it"—this has been our traditional American credo. If a man unfortunately encounters certain obstacles while en route to his goal, let him turn to religion as an additional resource, for faith is nothing but a formula for positive thinking, a way of organizing our own thoughts and somehow harnessing the powers of the universe so that things will go the way we want them. The final achievement of the religious life is "peace of mind"—exactly the promise of the tranquilizer ads!

Such an interpretation of Christianity has been widespread in America during the past decade. In the face of all the turbulence of the contemporary world, Christianity has become merely a means of finding a private harbor where the individual can float his bark in peace. If we turn our attention to public issues, the role of religion is often merely to add the "halo effect" to things as they already are, or as we have already planned them. (Notice how the mention of God is usually reserved for the last sentence of political speeches.) "God bless America" is a fine sentiment if uttered as a humble prayer; but we too easily use it as the statement of an assured fact. Surely God could not possibly have any serious criticisms of our way of life!

The Religion of Scripture

What a contrast all this is to the religion that we encounter when we open the pages of the Scriptures. The message of the prophets of the Old Testament is anything but an assurance that all is well. "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!" cried Amos. "It is darkness, and not light" *(Amos 5:18)*. "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria. . . . Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches. . . . Who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!" *(Amos 6:1ff.)*

The message of the prophets is that of a divine holiness so elevated, and a divine judgment so profound, that the very kings of the earth must prostrate themselves. There is only one proper response: total repentance, which means a transformation in the totality of life. "Let justice roll down like waters," said Amos, "and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" *(Amos 5:24)*. And Jeremiah castigates the false prophets and false priests who peddle spiritual tranquilizers: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" *(Jeremiah 6:14)*.

Jesus himself stood in this tradition of the prophets. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth," he warned. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" *(Matthew 10:34)*. "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" *(Luke 12:49)*. With all of Jesus' stress on God's illimitable mercy, he never dulled the edge of man's responsibility to God for the kind of life he lived. Nor can the New Testament be used to evade the stress of the Old Testament upon obedience to God in the whole of this present life, including

its social and political dimensions. To be sure, the New Testament is interested in the "world to come," but its message is precisely that this world-to-come *has come.* "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is *at hand*" is Jesus' message *(Mark 1:15).* "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" *(Luke 17:21).* The reign of God is not merely a hope, but a presently operative reality. It is a field of force, like that of a gigantic magnet. If it comes close to us we find that we are irresistibly attracted or repelled. Like so many iron filings, our lives are redirected and rearranged by the kingdom's power.

The New Testament testifies, furthermore, that this kingdom of God that has come among us is not a mere impersonal entity; it is embodied most concretely in a person, the person of Jesus Christ. It is his teachings which reveal the kingdom's nature; it is his deeds that demonstrate its power; it is his death and resurrection that seal the kingdom's victory. In his life and death Jesus faced the worst of anxiety and suffering that man can meet —indeed he faced hell itself. But none of the powers of destruction were able to defeat him, and he rose victorious to be our life and our salvation. That Jesus Christ is Lord, and that neither "principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" *(Romans 8:38, 39)*—this is the source of the Christian's courage to care, even in the midst of the greatest anguish that may mark our age.

The Christian Pattern

If the reality of the crucified and risen Christ provides the source of the Christian's courage, the crucified and risen Christ

likewise provides the pattern of the Christian's caring. We see this connection in the gospel passage in which Jesus indicated to his disciples the path that he himself would tread: "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes . . .", which was followed immediately by his challenge to dedication: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" *(Luke 9:22, 23).* St. Paul likewise sees the Christian life as an imitation of the life of Christ. "Be imitators of me," he writes, "as I am of Christ" *(I Corinthians 11:1).*

On this subject of the imitation of Christ there has been much superficial thinking. What does it mean? Surely not the donning of beards or bathrobes in order to resemble him physically, as in a Sunday school pageant. Nor does it necessarily mean giving up all worldly goods and going about on foot from town to town. Rather, it means to imitate the basic character, the underlying intention and direction of the life of Christ. It means to imitate, in our own situation, his utter self-surrender to the will of God, his complete self-sacrifice for man's redemption.

Notice that when St. Paul comes to explain what he means by modeling one's life on the life of Christ, he does not dwell on external details, nor does he restrict himself to the career of Christ as we know it within the confines of human history. He reaches back before the Incarnation, and stretches forward to the consummation. "Have this mind among yourselves," he pleads, "which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him. . . ." *(Philippians 2:5-9).* This is the sequence and the pattern that we are to imitate: renunciation, self-emptying, humility, obedience unto death; then, and only then, exaltation!

Like the cable of a suspension bridge

There is a perceptible form, Paul is telling us, to God's revelation of himself in Christ. It is the form of a servant. Grace has a certain shape—the shape of a descent and an ascent. Like the cable of a suspension bridge, God's grace in Christ swoops down from heaven, touching earth in order to raise up earth to a new and heavenly existence. This form and shape of the career of Christ we are to imitate. Stooping in all humility to meet our neighbor's need, caring enough to face the anxieties of life and to take upon ourselves its burdens, we shall find ourselves and our neighbor and the world itself borne upward to fulfillment in God's kingdom. In our weakness is his strength made perfect.

We can say the same thing in another way, by saying that the Christian life is a life of love. After all, Jesus himself summed up all the requirements of the law in the twofold commandment of love for God and neighbor. But what really is "love"? There

is hardly a word which is more abused today. From the teen-ager's incessant songs about love as infatuation and romance, to the commercial's promise that "You'll just *love* the feel of Kleenex towels," the term is made to cover a vast multitude of sins. Most uses of the word, however, have one basic meaning: love is an attraction to what is attractive. We love what is lovable, what will gratify our own interests or desires (whether they be mental or physical or spiritual or social). Quite different is the love depicted in the New Testament as the pattern of the Christian life. Here is a love which is not self-seeking but self-denying, not self-gratifying but self-emptying. It is "patient and kind; . . . not jealous or boastful; . . . not arrogant or rude." This love "does not insist on its own way; . . . is not irritable or resentful; . . . does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right." It is the kind of love which in the face of any disappointment or adversity willingly "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (See *I Corinthians 13:4-7.)*

How remarkable this portrait of love is which Paul has drawn! The question has been asked, "Did he dream it up out of his own imagination, or was there someone who, as it were, sat for the portrait?" We know that Paul did have a model, and that model was Christ. The portrait of the Christian as he ought to be is the portrait of Christ Jesus as he really was. He is the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith; he is the Pattern for our life.

An Activating Concern

Thus Christianity, when true to its original biblical character, is by no means a tranquilizer. It is an activating concern that sends men into the world ready for sacrifice and suffering. In view of this, how ironic it is that the Protestant Reformation,

which had no other aim than to restore biblical Christianity to Christendom, has been accused of dampening the ethical responsibility of the believer. Luther's great principle of justification by faith (which was St. Paul's principle before him) has been interpreted, not only by critics but sometimes even within the Lutheran fold itself, as if it implied a religion of pure passivity. Luther's own interpretation was completely different, and he would point out that such an implication could be drawn only if the meaning of "faith" has been completely misunderstood. Only if faith meant something purely intellectual (the acceptance of proper doctrines), or something purely emotional (a subjective feeling which might blow hot or cold), could it be without direct and lasting ethical effects. Faith, in actuality, is the name for a man's relationship to God in the totality of his existence. To have faith means to be grasped by God; it means to accept Christ as Lord of all spheres of man's existence upon earth—social, political, economic, or whatever they may be. Thus faith is inherently dynamic. It enables the Holy Spirit to carry on his regenerating activity, bringing about the "new man," through whom God's will is done! As Luther put it:

"O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith, and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question arises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. . . . Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. . . . Hence a man is ready and glad, without compulsion, to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, in love and praise of God, who has shown him this grace." *

* Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, *Works of Martin Luther,* Philadelphia Edition (Phila.: Muhlenberg Press, 1932), Vol. VI, p. 451f.

Far from "cutting the nerve" of Christian ethical responsibility, Luther had discovered its deepest dynamic: the dynamic of gratitude. To acknowledge justification by faith means to give up the struggle to achieve my own salvation and to be willing to accept it as a gift of God's forgiveness, conferred upon me, a sinner, with no merit on my part. When a man has experienced this infinite divine mercy, made known and made available in Christ, then arises a sense of gratitude so overwhelming that it cannot help but overflow in love, in spontaneous concern for the neighbor's need. We cannot repay God for his inestimable gift, but we can convert our thanksgiving into sacrificial service. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren," said our Lord, "you did it to me" *(Matthew 25:40).*

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What is your own reaction to the stress on "the power of positive thinking" as the means to happiness?
2. Read *Amos* in its entirety and discuss it.
3. Can emotional tension and anxiety ever be completely eliminated from life?
4. Did Jesus provide us with a specific program for social or political reform? If not, does this mean that Christianity is irrelevant to these matters?
5. Read the twelfth chapter of *Romans.* What is the significance of the word "therefore" in verse 1?
6. What is meant by the "shape" of God's revelation of himself in Christ?
7. Is the love of a mother for her children the same as the Christian love described in the New Testament?
8. Explain in your own words the meaning of "justification by faith."

3

Creation—Dislocation—Restoration

THE CHRISTIAN DOES NOT FLEE from the world; he willingly lives in it, there to serve his God by serving his fellowmen. But what of the world in which he lives? Is it a godless world? Is it, apart from the Christian's own contribution, a world devoid of divine activity?

Many in our modern age have thought so. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed not only that God is absent, but that "God is dead." The faith in a living and active God that sustained believers through the centuries has been shattered, he felt, in our time.

It is not surprising that those who have been alienated from the Christian faith think of the world as being godless. What is surprising and distressing is the extent to which professing Christians themselves share this assumption! Surely we believe that there is a God, and that we have met him in the depths of our own souls; but we fail to recognize his footprints in our public affairs. "Religion," the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said, "is what a man does with his own solitariness." This may be true as far as it goes, but is the definition adequate? Hardly, if we consider the full dimensions of the biblical faith.

Creation

What has happened is that we have forgotten the very First Article of the Christian Creed: that God is not only the Redeemer

and the Sanctifier, but also the Creator. Of what is he the Creator? Of both the heavens *and the earth;* of "all things visible and invisible." It was a denial of this fundamental truth that led to one of the first Christian heresies. The God whom we know in Jesus Christ, some people thought, was far too exalted a being to have been responsible for the creation of the earth. The heavens, yes, but not the earth! This sorry realm that we call earth must have been the creation of some second and lower god. The church rejected this heresy most decisively, as the First Article of the Creed demonstrates. But Christianity has never been entirely immune to its recurrence.

The story of creation as we have it in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis is a powerful testimony to the faith that this world in which we live is not foreign to God but is the product of his own gracious purposes. Day by day God proceeds to endow his handiwork with ever greater richness and complexity; and after each phase of the creation is completed, we have the affirmation that to the Creator it is good.

"And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. . . . God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. . . . And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good." The climax of the creation is the emergence of him who was to be the lord over all the lesser creatures; and to him also, the refrain applies: ". . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply,

and fill the earth and subdue it.'... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" *(Genesis 1:3-31).*

Note that not merely humanness in general, but maleness and femaleness in particular are aspects of God's plan. The relation between the sexes was a part of Paradise! Similarly daily work was a part of God's scheme for his creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" *(Genesis 2:15).* The whole story of man's efforts to carve a culture out of the raw materials of nature, culminating in the development of complex civilizations, may be regarded as a response to the divine command to "fill the earth and subdue it."

Archbishop William Temple once remarked that Christianity was the most materialistic of all the religions known to man. Its aim is not to provide a way of escape from the concreteness and materiality of earthly life, but rather to call a man to faithful obedience to God precisely within this "worldly" context. Christianity involves the confidence that just as God is the world's Creator, so he is its Sustainer, active still. Whatever he ordains, that he preserves and governs. Behind all the phenomena of nature, amidst all the entanglements of human history, our faith teaches us to see the working of a gracious God.

Perhaps one source of the negative attitude toward the material side of life that has sometimes held sway among Christians has been a misunderstanding of what the New Testament has to say about the "flesh." It is clear that the Scriptures present us with an opposition between flesh and spirit. But what is meant by "flesh"? In actuality, it means *man as a totality*—apart from God. It means mankind *bound together* by a common humanity—the whole bundle of created existence. "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field," says the prophet *(Isaiah*

". . . like the flowers of the field"

40:6); but he is referring to the transitoriness of human existence as a whole. When the same prophet later says, "Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord your Savior" *(Isaiah 49:26)*, it is clear that "all flesh" means "all men." When the New Testament talks about the struggle between flesh and spirit, it is really talking about the struggle between man and God. You will notice that "spirit" in these verses is usually spelled with a capital "S" (cf., for instance, *Romans 8:1-17).* The line of demarcation runs not between a higher and a lower part of man (the spiritual vs. the material), but between the creature as a whole and his Creator (man vs. God).

Thus when Paul says that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" *(Galatians 5:24),* he is not referring to a campaign against the physical side of life as such, but is rather referring to the total renunciation of self which is involved in the Christian's taking up his cross and following his Lord. The desires of the flesh which are to be

crucified include the more spiritual sins (jealousy, anger, selfishness) as well as the more carnal ones (drunkenness, carousing, and the like) *(Galatians 5:20f.)*.

Dislocation

The opposition between God and man reminds us that when we have stressed the goodness of the creation we have not concluded the Christian description of the world. The story of the world and our life is a story with two themes: divine grace and human sin. There is a contrary element in God's creation—something that struggles against his purposes. We cannot fully understand its nature or origin, but when we call it "sin" we acknowledge that *we* are, in part at least, responsible. For sin means rebellion against the Creator, and among all the creatures of God man alone has freedom to rebel. Thus the Christian analysis of life does not chalk up the basic human problem to cultural lag, bad luck, or poor digestion, but to man's own self-will.

This does not mean that the exact consequences of each man's sin are visited upon his own head. Job, a righteous man in the eyes of his fellows, yet suffered more than all of them and discovered that there is no exact equation between virtue and reward. The psalmists stress this point repeatedly. We suffer for each other's failures, just as we benefit from each other's strengths. Nor is sin a matter of single acts of wrongdoing which consciously violate some commandment. Behind the deed lies the thought, and beneath the thought the deep-rooted tendency, sin in the singular—a wrong orientation in man's whole existence, which can crop out in all kinds of specific sins.

It is significant that we call the story of man's original rebellion, recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, the story of

the "fall." We use the image of a movement in space, a dropping, a dislocation. The image is a good one, for sin is just that: a *dislocation* of man's relationship to God as well as of his relation to his fellowmen and the rest of God's creation.

Man, as the Bible understands him, occupies a strangely intermediate position in the total scheme of things. On the one hand, he is the most exalted of the creatures. "Thou hast made him little less than God," says the psalmist *(Psalm 8:5)*. Of man alone among the creatures is it said that he was created in God's very image. Yet between him and his Creator there is a great gulf. Exalted as man may be in relation to the other creatures, before God's majesty man's greatness is as dust and ashes. Man alone is to walk erect on the earth, a fitting symbol of his special status; but before his Lord, he is to bow in adoration and obedience. This, however, man is not satisfied to do. He is not content with the intermediate position in which he has been placed. Lured by the tempter's promise, man tries to climb, and that climbing is his fall.

The whole history of man can be written as the story of his reaching to the heights and his falling to the depths. Isn't this true of our lives as individuals? At times, when all is going well, we feel an immeasurable self-assurance; we feel dependent on nothing and no one. "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." But it is not long before we learn the truth of the proverb, "Pride goes before the fall." We have overreached ourselves. We have overestimated our own powers, our own wisdom, our own virtue. Deceived by this false self-confidence we let down the bars, and before long are dismayed to find ourselves in the grip of elemental forces of the flesh (in the sense of the full range of temptations we discussed above). The

same is true of the social movements and philosophies that compete for man's allegiance. Either they estimate man's capacities too highly, resulting in an optimism or idealism that fails to reckon with man's perennial shortsightedness and selfishness; or they fall into a cynicism that makes complete nonsense of man's aspirations and tramples his dignity underfoot, as we have witnessed in the totalitarian regimes of modern times. False exaltation and abject debasement—these are the poles between which man's rebellion oscillates.

In still another sense the Christian view of man's situation in life is that of a mean between two extremes. Man is created neither to live an isolated, purely individual existence, nor on the other hand to be submerged in collectivity. He is meant to be a person-in-community. Notice how Adam, in the Genesis account, must face God as an individual. "Where are you?" God calls to him in the garden, and the "you" is singular *(Genesis 3:9).* No one else can answer for him in the interior recesses of his existence where he knows that he is responsible to his Creator. And yet, "It is not good that the man should be alone" *(Genesis 2:18).* Man was created for community. It is not an accident, or merely a burdensome necessity, but a part of the Creator's plan that man is driven by his very nature toward the relationship of marriage and family, co-operative work and economic interchange, and all those joint enterprises that constitute a functioning civilization. Man cannot be man apart from his fellows—he could not even learn to speak were there not speakers to imitate. Yet he cannot be fully man either if he so submerges himself in an anonymous mass that he loses his individual identity.

Even man's relationship to nature is affected by his fall. Now nature, instead of being a friend to man, becomes a terror to him;

and conversely, man becomes an enemy to nature. Not only does he "subdue" the earth but he ravages it. Losing reverence for God, we lose our reverence for his creation. So the whole of nature as well as mankind needs to be redeemed. "The whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now," writes Paul, waiting until the day when it will be "set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" *(Romans 8:21f.).*

Restoration

The glorious liberty of the children of God! This is the promised redemption, and it is in order to understand its character more fully that we have reviewed the story of the creation and the fall. For it is the Christian faith that God's intent in his redemptive work, which climaxes in the career of Christ, is nothing less than the restoration of the full glory of his original creation. God does not despise his handiwork, nor does he abandon man and the world to their own destructive tendencies. Rather, he himself takes steps to intervene, restoring the lost harmony between man and man, between man and nature, between man and God.

It is for this reason that Jesus Christ is called in the New Testament the Second Adam: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" *(I Corinthians 15:22).* In him humanity receives a fresh start. Those who cleave to Christ—those who constitute the church—are the "first fruits" of the new humanity that takes its origin in him. If the fall is dislocation, in redemption we experience relocation. Now we are raised from the level of brutes to the status of men again; and yet, we are kept within the proper limits of man's status by the knowl-

edge that all that we have and are we owe to Christ, and not to ourselves. In Christian faith we are brought into the most personal relationship to God; and yet at the same time we are incorporated into the church, a community so close-knit that it can function as the very body of Christ. When the grip of guilt has been released by the acceptance of divine forgiveness then the glory and the goodness of God's world can be enjoyed again, and life can be lived abundantly, as God meant it to be lived. "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" *(II Corinthians 5:17).*

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. From the Christian viewpoint, is the world good or bad? Defend your answer.
2. What difference would it make in your life if you really believed that "God is dead"?
3. Suppose that no one believed in God. What difference would that make in the life of your neighborhood or your community?
4. Discuss the statement: "Religion is what a man does with his own solitariness."
5. Discuss the statement: "Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions."
6. What is meant by the statement: "The whole history of man can be written as the story of his reaching to the heights and his falling to the depths"?
7. Which do you think are the more serious, "carnal" sins or "spiritual" sins? Which are the more difficult to deal with?
8. How has man's fall affected his relation to nature?
9. Does present-day American society tend to place greater stress upon man as an individual or man as a part of the community?
10. In what sense is man's redemption a "relocation"?
11. A certain church has this inscription on its doorway: "Founded on Christ—founded for man." Is this an appropriate inscription? Why, or why not?

4

Life in the Spirit

"WAIT A MINUTE! When are we coming back down to earth?" This might well be the reaction to the way in which the last chapter concluded. Is everything really so rosy, so completely transformed? This doesn't sound like the world in which we live, even as Christians.

As a matter of fact we have to admit that the objection is a valid one. Just as our description of the natural world was not complete without reckoning with the fall as well as the creation, so our description of the world of redemption must acknowledge that the restoration of all things in Christ is not yet complete. To be exact we should say it is complete in itself—but it is not yet made fully actual in human history. The kingdom of God which Christ proclaimed and which he personified has been inaugurated, but it has not yet been consummated.

Saints, Yet Sinners

If it were not for the "already inaugurated" our faith would be in vain. Christianity rests on the conviction that a genuinely new factor entered into the human scene with the advent of Jesus Christ and his church. But if we overlooked the "not yet consummated" we would be guilty of an optimism equally as unrealistic as that of those who forget man's fall. I am a new man in Christ; but the old man still lives within me. The world-to-come has come; but we still live with one foot in the world-as-it-

has-always-been. So the Christian life is a complex one. It involves the recognition that we are, as Luther said, "at the same time saints and sinners"—saints by virtue of the righteousness of Christ which has begun to work within us, but sinners in that our old sinful nature still remains. The Christian life involves a constant struggle between these two divergent factors.

Frequently the thought has been expressed that if enough of the world's people, and especially its strategic leaders, became Christians, all the world's problems would be solved. But would they? They would, if all were perfect Christians. But we know from our own experience as individuals that we are never wholly responsive to the divine will, and the transformation of our lives is never complete. This is all the more true in the case of a plurality of Christians. History indeed shows that the attempts which have been made to rule society in the name of Christianity, that is, to establish some kind of theocratic state, have had severe shortcomings.

Be that as it may, the fact is that in the present world there is no unanimous assent to Christianity. Christians face the problem of living out their faith in the context of a non-Christian world. What are some of the consequences of this situation?

Love's Indirect Expressions

One consequence of the fact that Christians must live in a non-Christian world is that Christian love must often find indirect expression. Love, in its essence, is a very personal relationship. Its exemplar is the Good Samaritan, who was personally concerned enough to stop and minister to the assaulted traveler's needs in a direct way. Love implies a neighbor whom I confront directly, to whose situation I respond as person to person. But

notice that even the Good Samaritan had to be on his way, and had to hand his charge over to the innkeeper. It is even more true that in a complex society like our own, Christian love may have to use quite cold and impersonal means to do its work. That would be true, of course, even in an ideal society. Even in a Christian world a Christian could not personally deliver a needed cup of water to each of his three million neighbors in a great city. His proper course of action would be to support an adequate filtering, pumping, and piping system. In a world that is not perfectly Christian the problem is further complicated by the mixture of motives that enters in.

Consider the question of the treatment of criminals, for instance. Shall a criminal be made to "pay for his crime," that is, shall he be made to suffer at least as much as those against whom the crime was committed? Is retribution and punishment the aim? Suppose the criminal is genuinely repentant for the wrong he has done. The Christian act would be to forgive him, to say, "Go and sin no more." But the Christian has to consider whether society is ready for such a course of action, and whether, moreover, the one who committed the crime and then repented is morally mature enough to be restrained in the future by anything less than the threat of punishment. In some cases the Christian might be well advised to press for increased, rather than decreased severity—for example, in the treatment of those apprehended as "pushers" in the narcotics traffic.

The Christian must recognize, in other words, that in the world as we know it, love's first business may be the pursuit of justice. Love is personal and profligate in its attention to those who need it most. Justice is impersonal and even-handed. Yet justice is an appropriate Christian goal, for fundamentally justice itself

means restoration, and thus it has a character comparable to that of God's own redemptive work. Justice is traditionally defined as "giving every man his due." With respect to the individual this means that each is to have the due share of this world's blessings, material or spiritual, which his Creator wants him to have. For the community as a whole it means the restoration of right social relationships, a due balance among the claims of individuals and groups, and the harmonious co-operation of all toward the promotion of the common welfare. In both respects, love finds that justice is its natural expression.

Interplay of Factors

The field of labor-management relations offers a good example of the interplay of these various factors. An employer, for instance, may be an active church member, but this is no guarantee that his employees will find his plant a satisfactory place in which to work. The employer may never have asked himself what the implications of his faith really are in connection with his Monday-to-Saturday responsibilities. Or he may have concluded that Christian love is sufficiently expressed if he maintains good personal relationships with his subordinates and perhaps provides them with baskets or bonuses at Christmas time. He does not ask himself: "Are the workers in my employ receiving *justice* in terms of basic factors such as wages and working conditions? Is the benevolence I show them in personal ways merely a mask for my unconcern about the more material side of their existence, a concern that might be costly to myself?" The chances are that basic improvements will have to be achieved by the pull and push of collective bargaining, or by the rough and tumble of strikes, or by a struggle in the political arena. The problem is further com-

plicated by the fact that frequently there is no "employer" in the singular, but a complex corporate structure with a highly organized bureaucracy. This will probably be just as true of labor as of management.

Is this adequate?

By such devious routes and in such unexpected ways the Christian ethic comes to expression. It is a matter of veering and tacking to achieve some proximate expression of the full character of Christian love. But to deduce from this that the Christian life is one of continual "compromise" would hardly be correct. For one thing, this would seem to imply that the Christian is serving in this world only reluctantly, and that he would really rather withdraw from these uncertainties. If the world is God's good creation, and if the Christian is to meet his neighbor where he is, then it is no "compromise" for him to have to work out his ethic in an imperfect world. There is no other place where he could serve. Furthermore, the conception that "compromise" is the basic

problem implies that the Christian is provided in the first place with some set of absolute rules which, if obeyed completely, would result in the perfect life, although, unfortunately, the rules cannot be obeyed one hundred per cent, and therefore the Christian must compromise. But does the Christian have such a set of infallible moral rules?

Illustration, Not Legislation

Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount has often been interpreted as though it laid down such an absolute program. If this were the case it would be quite out of character with the rest of Jesus' teaching as we have it in the New Testament. Jesus words are never abstract; they are concrete. In each of his parables he points up some very specific aspect of life—a sower with his seed, a woman anxious over a lost coin, a shepherd and his sheep—and uses it to drive home some very specific truth. That is true also in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew. Jesus is not giving legislation but *illustrations* of the meaning of a life that is lived in accordance with God's will. To turn the other cheek, to pray without ostentation, to refrain from judgment of one's brother—each of these points to a facet of the Christian character. They help us to comprehend what love means, but they do not tell us in advance what love requires to be done in every specific situation where an ethical decision confronts us.

A great deal of Jesus' teaching is not in the form of moral advice at all, even though it has its moral implications. Primarily Jesus gives not admonition but description. "This is how it is in God's kingdom," he teaches. His parables depict not ideals but realities; not merely what we wish life might be like

but what life *is* like within God's reign, a reign which is already being made effective among us. "This is how God acts," Jesus teaches: He blesses the poor, the meek, the merciful, exalts the humble, and humbles the proud. This is what you are, if you are truly God's: the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Here we have an ethic of imitation. What God has done, that we are to do, making our lives congruent to the shape and character of his great creative and redemptive work.

Living persons in relation to a living God! How different this is from the effort to encase life in a set of abstract principles. Often the "man of principle" becomes not only proud of his own virtues but so sure that he already knows what is right that he is insensitive to the real situation that confronts him. He may make it a principle never to give money to those who approach him on a city street, on the premise that there are many social agencies to care for the destitute, and besides, the man might well spend in the nearest tavern the money that would be given him. But does this release him from his obligation still to listen to the man, still to look him in the face to see whether this might perhaps be the exception, the case where at a point of genuine crisis he could be of profound help to a human being? Actually, Christians know that there may come a time when any principle, however valid under ordinary circumstances, must be put aside so that love's extraordinary work may not be hindered. This is what was discovered, for instance, by the Christians who participated in the resistance movement in Western Europe during the Second World War, and who found that, unless their whole effort to undermine the Nazi regime and prepare for liberation were to collapse, they could not shrink from lying to the Gestapo, using faked passports, and buying gasoline on the black market.

The Risk of Freedom

What a terrible freedom God has given us! And what a terrible risk he himself has taken in treating us not as children but as adults! There have been many efforts in the history of the faith to retract this freedom. In the history of Judaism we can see this process. "Torah" or "law" meant originally the "gracious guidance" which God offers to men, the broad revelation of his will which is discernible in his dealings with his people. But by the end of the Old Testament period the concept of law had been reduced to that of a specific set of positive and negative commandments which told the Jews precisely what was the proper moral or ritual behavior. It was against this rigidifying of the law that Jesus protested, and likewise St. Paul when he rejected the law of "statutes and ordinances" in favor of the "glorious liberty" we have in Christ.

The Source of Guidance

Though God does not give us all the answers in advance, he has not left us without aid in our ethical dilemmas. He has provided the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, at the conclusion of his days of ministry, promised the coming of the Paraclete, the Counselor or Comforter. He, the Spirit of truth, would lead the disciples into all truth. The early Christians lived in the conviction that Pentecost had been the fulfillment of this promise, and that the Holy Spirit was active and powerful among them. It is upon this that St. Paul relies when he continually reminds the Christians that they are "not of the flesh but of the Spirit," and when he declares, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" *(II Corinthians 3:17)*. This Spirit, however, is not the Spirit of license but of responsibility. His fruits are "love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" *(Galatians 5:22, 23)*.

How, practically speaking, is the guidance of the Spirit received? How can the individual discern what God, through his Holy Spirit, is urging him to do? Let us give a brief threefold answer. First, through the prayerful searching of the Scriptures. The perceptive powers of the inward being must be prepared by spiritual discipline and prayer, and then, in order to find God's will, one must look to the record of his self-revelation as we have it in the Scriptures. There we learn the character of God, and there in the Word which guided the patriarchs and prophets, and supremely in the Word made flesh, we hear the word that the Spirit today would speak to us.

Secondly, we discern the Spirit's guidance when we give heed to the consensus of the church. The Spirit is not granted only to a person as an individual; it is this same Spirit through which God calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church. True, the individual Christian can never simply hand over his conscience to the church, letting its priests or its pronouncements make his decisions for him. This would be to abandon his maturity and freedom under God. But if the church through its witness in past ages has established a precedent, or if through conference and consultation it comes to a consensus on a fundamental issue in our own society, the individual Christian should pay most serious heed to these convictions at which his brethren, under the guidance of the Spirit, have arrived.

The third source of the Spirit's speaking is implicit in our emphasis on the situation-oriented character of Christian ethics: the Spirit may use the problem-situation itself to reveal to us the direction in which a faithful and loving response would

move. This interplay between faith and facts will engage our attention in following chapters as we deal with specific problem areas.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the Christian view of life optimistic or pessimistic?
2. What is meant by the statement that we are saints, yet sinners?
3. If you had the opportunity to reform American life in accordance with the Christian faith as you understand it, what are the first changes that you would make?
4. Do you feel that capital punishment can be justified from a Christian standpoint?
5. A prominent psychologist who deals with rehabilitating emotionally disturbed children wrote a book entitled *Love Is Not Enough.* What could he have meant by this?
6. Discuss the statement, "You will never get anywhere in this world if you are not willing to compromise."
7. Can you point out examples in contemporary Christianity of the effort to determine in advance all answers to ethical problems?
8. What is the risk that is involved in freedom?
9. Review and discuss the section dealing with the three ways in which the guidance of the Holy Spirit is received.

5

"Marriages Are Made in Heaven"

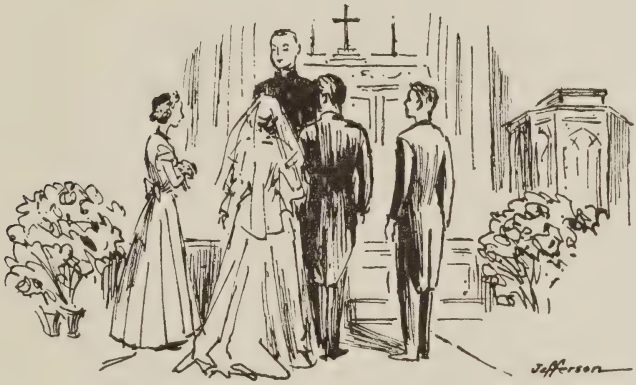
EVEN IN A DAY when very few people still believe in providence many a young man has been known to whisper to his young lady, "You were meant for me." Meant by whom? It could only be by God. Here, at least, is one kind of faith that is still strong: the faith that "marriages are made in heaven."

A Blessed Estate

To prove objectively that God intends precisely this man and this woman to enter together into the holy estate of matrimony would be difficult, although the couple itself, if they are Christians, should be quite definitely convinced in their own hearts and minds that it is God's will for them to marry. But beyond the question of a particular match, it is surely evident that marriage as such is "made in heaven." There is nothing that is more deeply embedded in the character of the creation.

This means that marriage shares in the goodness of the creation. If "it is not good that the man should be alone," then it *is* good that he should have woman as his companion. The Christian view of marriage involves an appreciation of the blessings it brings—the joy of partnership in life's fundamental tasks, the pleasures of hearth and hospitality, the ever-changing relationship between parents and their growing children, the shelter that home and family provide for the spirit that is bruised by life's daily struggle. This does not mean that life's meaning

and fulfillment can be known *only* within this framework. God also has his blessings and his tasks for the unmarried, whether they are such by choice or chance. But those who find themselves within the married estate ought often voice a prayer of thanks to God for the deep and lasting blessings that it brings.



. . . a holy estate, ordained of God

As we have seen, no human institution is viewed realistically if it is considered only from the standpoint of its original created goodness. In the area of marriage, too, sin rears its head. In fact the church has traditionally viewed this institution not only as an "order of creation" but also as a "remedy for sin." This concept rests upon a frank recognition of the power of the sexual drive. The marriage bond provides the framework within which this impulse may find legitimate fulfillment. Why is it here legitimate? Because in marriage the *sexual* relationship is part of a *total interpersonal* relationship, and that is what God intended sex to be. Moreover, only within marriage is sexual

expression accompanied by a commitment to responsibility for the possible outcome, the birth of a new life. Surely this, too, is God's intention: that a child should not be born into the world without a father and a mother to guide and guard him.

The Christian View of Sex

The Christian view does not regard sex itself as sinful, but only the improper expression of sex. The distinction is crucial, if we are to overcome our vacillation between prudery and libertinism. Americans used to live under a regime of sexual repression which almost amounted to pretending that this area of life did not exist. At least this was true publicly. What went on behind the scenes is another matter. Officially sex was regarded as something evil, and the young were to be shielded from it as long as possible. Psychiatrists can document the deep-lying sense of guilt that this attitude produced in many persons who keenly felt both the moral strictures and their own implanted impulses. What of our own day, when sexual freedom amounting to almost unbridled license prevails? Psychiatrists have testified that unlimited expression of sexual desire is just as psychologically destructive as strict repression. The human being has a need for limitations, for discipline, that is just as fundamental as its need for freedom. Furthermore, one does not fully enjoy anything that one has in too great abundance. The teen-ager of today is so surrounded with sexual stimuli and so well-versed in sexual expression that his appreciation of it is deadened by sheer repetition before he ever reaches marriage.

When will we learn to treat the sexual side of life as a natural part of God's creation? Either we repress it, but find that it surges up in unexpected and destructive ways; or we exalt it, and

thereby in actuality debase it. Again, it is a question of keeping to the intermediate position to which the Creator has assigned us. To restore sexual expression to its true role as a significant but not all-consuming factor in human life is an important aspect of the re-creation that God wills for us in Christ.

One's basic attitude toward this whole question will determine one's position on the subject of planned parenthood. If the sexual act apart from procreation is sinful, then it can be justified only as a means of procreation. The deliberate prevention of procreation would then be wrong. But if sexual expression is accepted as a basically good aspect of the Creator's plan, intended by him as an important form of human inter-relationship, then it is justified even apart from procreation. This does not mean that husband and wife have license to use this relationship purely for their own selfish purposes, while avoiding the responsibilities that come with children. Here as in every aspect of their lives, freedom under the Spirit means a mature and faithful stewardship of God's gifts. To quote the statement adopted by the United Lutheran Church in America in 1956:

> Parents are called to exercise the power of procreation responsibly before God. This implies planning their parenthood in accordance with their ability to provide for their children and carefully nurture them in fullness of Christian faith and life. The health and welfare of the mother-wife should be a major concern in such decisions. Irresponsible conception of children up to the limit of biological capacity and selfish limitation of the number of children are equally detrimental. ("Summary Statements on Marriage and Family Life," No. 4, *ULCA Minutes, 1956,* page 1145.)

Sources of Tension

It is not only through sex, however, that sin manifests itself within the relationship of marriage. The very fact that two

unique human personalities, with differing likes and dislikes, differing backgrounds, and frequently differing conceptions of life's goals, are brought together under one roof, is enough to cause great tensions. Moreover, the ingrained selfishness and lack of imagination and appreciation of others that blight all of our human relationships is bound to be reflected in this most intimate of ties. Added to this are the special strains that the modern social situation puts upon family life, such as our penchant for constantly pulling up stakes and moving, long absences of the husband from the home, and frequently the mother's absence as she pursues a career of her own, perhaps as a necessity, perhaps simply as relief from boredom.

In view of all these factors it is a wonder that marriages can be sustained at all. Certainly the modern conception of "romance" does not provide an adequate foundation. Romantic love is primarily a feeling, and feelings are notoriously fickle. The notion that the couples who have "fallen in love" are thereby automatically suited to marriage, and that they will without any further ado live happily ever after, easily breaks down in the realistic light that dawns when the honeymoon is over. This holds true even if the honeymoon lasts several years.

Marriage as a Contract

The conception of marriage as a contract, so widely held today, is hardly any more adequate. According to this view, entering a marital relationship is something like signing a contract in the business world. To be sure, it is binding up to a certain point. But if circumstances should become sufficiently unpleasant, a loophole can always be found. The marriage can be declared bankrupt, and one is free to try again. The only question is to see

that the relationship is severed according to the proper legal procedure, either of one's own state or of some more lenient locality. What does this mean for the character of a marriage? It means that even while the relationship remains outwardly intact there is a built-in *assumption of impermanency* which weakens the bond from the very first. Even while the vows are being taken there is the thought in the back of the mind that the contract can always be terminated if necessary; and this very thought makes it less likely that the couple will be able to resolve their differences.

A Covenant of Love

The only adequate basis for successful marriage is the biblical view: the conception of marriage as a *covenant of love.* A contract is breakable, a covenant is not. We read in the Old Testament not that the Lord made a contract with his people—his grace was not conditional upon stipulated conditions to be fulfilled—but that he made a covenant with them, pledging that come what may, he would be their God. Even if they proved faithless, God would remain faithful, trusting to his covenant-love to woo them back once more. The coming of Christ altered this special covenant relationship to the old Israel, but only in order to establish a new covenant with the new Israel, the church. This is the "new testament" that is sealed in Christ's very blood. Marriage, biblically understood, is this kind of indissoluble bond. *Fidelity* is its key word—faithfulness like unto the faithfulness of God. It is based not upon a feeling, but upon a vow.

So profound is the mystical union between husband and wife that grows within such a covenant of love that the New Testament dares to compare this relationship with the sacred union

between Christ and the church. He is the long-awaited Bridegroom, and the church is his eager bride. The ever-freshened intimacy between Christ and his chosen people is the image and the inspiration of the Christian family relationship. As Christ is united with the soul, so the husband and the wife become "one flesh." And the love that sustains a Christian marriage takes as its model Christ's own love. In the face of a love that is more interested in sacrifice for the other's welfare than in satisfaction for itself, the greatest threats to marital happiness prove powerless.

Breaking the Unbreakable

Situations may occur, however, where divorce is called for. Here is a paradox. The church insists that a couple must enter marriage with absolutely no reservations. It is to last "till death us do part." Yet the church recognizes that human sin and human failure are so pervasive that situations may arise where the conditions within a home become literally intolerable. Certainly every effort must be made to overcome the problems and to reconcile the marriage partners once again. But in the face of problems such as continued alcoholism, financial irresponsibility, physical cruelty, or absolute incompatibility of temperament and goals, all concerned may come to the conclusion that the lesser evil, if not the greater good, is the severance of the relationship. In such a situation divorce may be the will of God, for God's will is never abstract but always related to concrete circumstances. For the Christian this is an option that is on the very boundary of the permissible, for the tragic character of divorce is clearly seen. It represents a breaking of the unbreakable and is to be contemplated only with fear and trembling. When children are involved all the considerations are obviously still

more serious. Recent psychological research shows that in some instances it may be less harmful for a child to continue to live within an unhappy family relationship than to be deprived entirely of one or the other of his parents through a divorce.

Remarriage

The remarriage of divorced persons is to be approached with prayer and circumspection. The church asks primarily two questions. First, "Does the person involved in the remarriage recognize his own share in the break-up of the previous marriage?" Before the law one partner is generally declared guilty and the other innocent, but in the eyes of God both are accountable for the failure that divorce represents. Rare is the case where both have not contributed to the tensions that resulted in the break-up. The church's second question is, "Does the couple seeking marriage intend with full sincerity that their relationship shall be lifelong and that it be lived within the context of worship and church membership?" If these conditions of repentance and commitment are satisfied the remarriage may be performed with the church's blessing.

Changing Roles

The church's primary attention, however, must be directed toward the *prevention* of marriage failure, and toward helping Christian couples to resolve the problems that arise even within the best of homes. Many of these problems are accentuated by the changing character of the society in which we live. What is the proper role of man and woman in the world today? In a former day, the supremacy of the male was taken for granted, both in the home and in the community. The twentieth century

has seen widespread success of woman's effort to achieve equality. But with her new status has come a new uncertainty concerning her role. Many have wondered whether in casting off old restrictions modern woman did not also cast off something of the nature of femininity itself. Perhaps it is part of the order of creation that women shall tend children rather than pound typewriters!

This is said in full recognition of the fact that, by choice or circumstances, many a woman will find herself unmarried, and that for such a person (or for a man in the same position) a full Christian life is surely possible. What should be clear is that the equality of men and women cannot mean identity of function. It is rather the equality of a complementary relationship. This complementariness is quite evident biologically; it is equally true psychologically, sociologically, and theologically. We need one another. "In the Lord," as Paul observes, "woman is not independent of man nor man of woman" *(I Corinthians 11:11).* Christian families need opportunities, within the context of the church, to talk over the specific meaning of this mutuality in the contemporary world.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What problems cause tensions in today's families?
2. Do you feel that a family has a greater chance for stability and happiness in a rural environment than in an urban one?
3. What is the difference between thinking of marriage as a contract and thinking of it as a covenant of love?
4. What effect are television, movies, and magazines having on youth's attitudes toward sex and marriage? What about popular songs?
5. Under what circumstances, if any, do you feel that it is justified for a mother to work outside the home?
6. Under what circumstances, if any, is divorce justified?
7. Under what circumstances may the church sanction remarriage?
8. What can the church do to help prevent marriage failures?

6

The Daily Shuttle

From home to work, from work to home

"HOMEWOOD . . . FERNDALE . . . VILLA PARK . . . Downtown express, all aboard!" For millions the call of the Commuter's Special is the morning and evensong that defines the daily rhythm of their existence. From home to work, from work to home—this is the shuttle whose two ends define the two main foci of their lives. Whether it is the executive commuting from the suburb, the office girl descending to the subway, or the farmer climbing on his tractor, the rhythm is the same.

We have discussed the home. What of the sphere of daily work? How shall it be viewed in the light of Christian faith?

Drudgery or Opportunity?

In connection with matters marital we found a tendency to look at marriage through rose-tinted glasses. With regard to work it seems, interestingly enough, that the opposite is true. We think of work not in terms of opportunity but in terms of necessity; not as joy but as drudgery; not as a delight to hand and heart but as a pain in the neck. Just as we over-idealize marriage, so we are over-cynical about work. If the average person were asked to quote a biblical passage regarding work, he would most likely mention, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" *(Genesis 3:19).* We need to be reminded that work is a part of the story of the creation as well as of the fall. God put man into the garden "to till it and keep it" *(Genesis 2:15).* Work is part of the plan of God for human life. In and beyond the routine demands of our daily occupation we should be able to discern a dimension of divine significance.

Work is, first of all, an opportunity for *co-operation with the Creator.* In many respects we live in an unfinished universe. God is its Lord, but he chooses to use us as instruments in his work of governing, preserving, and continually enriching the creation. We look at a tree and say that it is made by God; we look at a bridge and say that it is man-made. Actually God, as the source and sustainer of the world, has been at work in both cases, but in the latter instance not through the self-directing laws of nature, but through the inspiration of the human mind and the empowering of the human arm. This does not mean that we can always identify our work with God's. Much that we do is contrary to his will. But God is active, whether in grace or judgment.

Secondly, work is an opportunity for *co-operation with our fellowmen.* In our modern world, particularly, no one is sufficient

by himself to produce all the goods required for the sustenance of life. One man raises sugar cane, another manufactures shoes. The interchange that is required for mutual satisfaction is the basis for forms of economic life that range from primitive barter to the modern stock market. Moreover, in the process of production itself we are involved in forms of human interrelationship. Whether we think of the factory, the farm, or the office, labor serves as the point of focus for a complex functioning society wherein many hands and minds contribute to the final product.

Modern Problems

In his work man has a cross to bear. The whole development of modern machinery in one sense has lightened the burden of work, but psychologically has increased it, for it has tended to make man himself superfluous, or at least peripheral. One study of a modern factory concluded that those who work there could best be described in terms of their relation to the machines. A man was either a "feeder," a "tender," or a "fixer." In any event the machines were central and the human beings had become their tools. The man at the assembly line is linked essentially not to his fellow-workers, but to the line itself; it is this which determines the pace and character of what he does. The machine is indispensable, the man replaceable. Today he is likely to be replaced not by another man but by another machine.

A great impersonality has entered the world of work. Even the stenographer is frequently no longer related to any particular individual but serves as a rotating member of a secretarial pool. The worker has become anonymous—an interchangeable unit. This is at least true of those on the lower and middle echelons of society. For those closer to the top the opposite may be true.

Work becomes super-personalized, demanding not too little but too much. Its meaning is exaggerated rather than diminished. Here we have those who do not look forward to the end of the day as an opportunity to escape from work to home, but who look forward to its beginning as an opportunity to escape from home to work. Frequently in such cases the family suffers, not only from the long absences of its head, but from the anxieties and psychosomatic illnesses that intense concentration on work produces. Paradoxically, for many such men their work really does not mean much in itself, for the position they hold at any given time is valued primarily as a steppingstone to something higher.

Every occupation and profession in modern life has its share of difficulties and temptations. Consider the farmer. In a former day he was thought of as the perfect example of one who labored in co-operation with both God and his fellowmen. He planted; God gave the increase; and the bread was used to feed the hungry. Today the farmer no longer works directly with his hands. He uses machinery as complex as that in many a factory. He no longer bows before the inscrutable vagaries of the weather; he invades the clouds to press rain from them. His produce is as likely to end up in government warehouses as in hungry mouths.

Or consider the medical profession, formerly thought of as the very model of altruism. The doctor would go anywhere, day or night, paid or unpaid, to render service. In recent years many people have wondered how to reconcile this image of the devoted servant with the tremendous financial rewards that have come to this profession. They have wondered whether the restrictions upon entrance to medical school may be motivated not only by a concern for maintaining the highest academic standards, but also by the desire not to spread these worldly benefits too thin.

The Christian Calling

What is the message of the Christian faith to those who find themselves involved in such ethical dilemmas? It is this: No matter what your occupation may be, or however morally dubious it may seem, it can still be a Christian calling. We will never live in a perfect society where our only choices will be those that are clearly good against those that are clearly evil. Within this actual world God calls us to himself, and this calling (Latin, *vocare*) can be worked out within any vocation that plays some constructive role within the human enterprise. Excepted would be only those types of work which are plainly and wholly contrary to human welfare; but God has issued no definitive list of what these are. He leaves this to the mature judgment of the Christian as he evaluates the ways in which he may serve God and man, not just in the margins of his time but in the major portion of the waking hours that he devotes to his occupation.

God can be served within the framework of this world. This was one of the major insights recovered for Christianity by the Reformers. In medieval Christendom only those who entered the monastic life, completely withdrawing from the ordinary round of life, were considered to have a true divine "calling." The work of all the rest was considered secular. Luther reversed all that. Actually the monastic life is no true calling at all, he insisted, since it serves no useful purpose either for God or man. The housemaid scrubbing floors was doing worthier service than the monk saying the rosary in his cell. Even the hangman, said Luther, can do his work with a clear conscience if he is convinced that it is essential to the maintenance of peace and order in society. Thus the first aspect of the Christian message concerning work is that if the Christian sincerely believes that his is

a calling in which God wishes him to serve, God's forgiveness is adequate to cover all the moral ambiguities the work entails.

Occupational Ethics

The fruit of justification, however, is sanctification. This is the second aspect of the Christian message concerning work. Once we have known this divine forgiveness we are impelled by gratitude to a continual effort to *transform from within* the character and conditions of work. How can work be made more congruous with the divine intent that it should be not drudgery but joy, not coldly calculating but a sphere of human fellowship? How can we regain the balance in which daily work has its legitimate place as a meaningful aspect of life without permitting it to become all-consuming? It is as a part of the attempt to answer such questions that many occupational groups have been led to reconsider their traditional "codes of ethics." Such codes should be more than gentlemen's agreements not to step on one another's professional toes; they should deal with the difficult issues involved in redirecting work toward genuine public service rather than private gain. But such efforts will be of little effect unless they reflect a personal dedication, a continually deepening search by dedicated men and women within each occupational group for the full challenge of their work when viewed as part of God's great creative and redeeming work. Here again, as in the case of families, persons involved in similar pursuits need opportunities within the framework of the church to talk over the dilemmas that they face as Christians in their daily work.

Beyond these problems of particular occupations there are the broad issues of how to cope with technological displacement, how to prevent the extremes of inflation and deflation, how to

channel a just share of our national wealth to the underprivileged peoples of the world—issues connected with the realm of economic interchange for which we all, as citizens of a democracy, have a responsibility under God.

Leisure Time

We have discussed the home and the shuttle to the scene of daily work. What of the hours still available when the worker returns to his home? This problem may well be considered here, for, paradoxically, a new field of work that has opened up in recent times is that of providing entertainment for those who are not at work. This is the "entertainment industry," or as it has been termed more broadly, the "leisure industry."

In a former day leisure was the prerogative only of the well-to-do. The common man worked from dawn to dusk, and the leisure of the few was built upon the labor of the many. Today the situation is reversed; for as we have seen, it is those in positions of leadership who are likely to be working twelve or fourteen hours a day, while the ordinary worker enjoys a forty-hour week, soon possibly to be reduced even further. With this development has come a new social and ethical problem. How will these new leisure hours be used? Constructively or aimlessly? Will they contribute to the growth of maturity and meaning of human life, or merely to the multiplication of superficial pleasures?

There seem to be indications in both directions. On the one hand, the "do-it-yourself" movement of the 1950's sprang, presumably, not only from the desire to cut costs in an inflationary period, but from a deep-seated urge to rediscover some kind of personal creativity in a mechanized age. Likewise the astounding sales of paperback books, many of them of excellent quality,

seemed to betoken a constructive use of leisure. But the major new leisure industry, television, unfortunately would have to be counted mostly on the negative side. Westerns, murder mysteries, and quiz shows constitute altogether too high a percentage of its offerings. Sponsors and program directors claim that they must give the public what it wants; but the public has precious little chance (except for the "intellectual ghetto" on Sunday afternoons) to choose shows of cultural or educational significance.

Perhaps the main trouble with television is the extreme to which it has carried the already existent trend toward spectator sports. Once upon a time, if you wanted some recreation you got a baseball game going on a vacant lot. Later there came a day when you merely watched the game in the local ball park. Today you need only turn on the TV set; in fact, if you tire of it, with the latest remote control tuning you needn't even get up out of your easy chair to turn it off. Bowling, ping-pong, and even the old-fashioned parlor games have been turned into this kind of spectator entertainment.

Radio, TV, newspapers, and the big-circulation magazines have been called the "mass media," and the name is indicative of the trouble with this kind of communication. It is a one-way affair; the recipient is purely passive. Mass media, when added to the effect of mass housing, mass production, mass entertainment, have the tendency to produce mass men—men who are indistinguishable from one another. Like so many marbles in a bag, they have neither distinctive identifying contours nor any real relation to one another. Even our education is on a mass basis. Surely it is one of the glories of American democracy that it has committed itself to grant the opportunity of education to every child; but if this means that the exceptional qualities of individuals are

neglected because the whole program must be directed to the least common denominator, then the price paid is too high. The creativity and insight and personal integrity needed by the leaders of our society cannot be manufactured on an assembly line.

The Christian, then, is called to a responsible existence under God which includes the whole range of his life's activities. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren," writes St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, "by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice"—and by bodies Paul means the whole of earthly life, both work and leisure. Presented as a sacrifice to the divine will and for the sake of human welfare, we may have confidence that it is "acceptable to God." The transformation follows from the acceptance: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." *(Romans 12:1, 2)*

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What opportunities for co-operation with God and co-operation with fellowmen does your daily work present?
2. Do most people you know find greater enjoyment in their hours at home or their hours at work?
3. Do you feel that most types of work today demand too little of the worker, or too much?
4. What effect has the labor movement had on the conditions of work?
5. Think over some of the ethical problems arising out of your own daily work and present them for discussion.
6. Do you think that "codes of ethics" for the various occupations are of any value?
7. What, if anything, can the church do to improve working conditions?
8. Discuss the effect, good or bad, that television is having (a) on children, (b) on adults.
9. What can Christian people do to improve the use made of leisure time?

7

Perspective on Race

All are children of God

NO DISCUSSION of the responsibility of Christians in the contemporary world can avoid the omnipresent problem of race relations. There is no issue on which the passions of men are more easily aroused. But intensity of feeling is no substitute for clarity of thought, nor for solid conviction based on faith. The greater the passion, the more need for perspective.

An Old Problem

It will help somewhat to gain a perspective in the time dimension. The racial problem is not a new problem. History has seen

the constant ebb and flow of group hostilities. In Jesus' time the Samaritans were a group despised by the Jews; it is this that made Jesus' choice of a Samaritan as the example of neighbor-love so surprising. Likewise no love was lost between Jew and Gentile. The Christians themselves were stigmatized in the Roman Empire as a "third race"—some new mongrelization—precisely because they had overcome within their fellowship the long-standing enmity and segregation between Jew and Gentile.

Strictly speaking, of course, such groups as the Samaritans and Jews were not racial groups but were what would today be called ethnic groups, i.e., groups distinguished by a common language, culture, and nationality. But the problem of prejudice and mutual hostility is the same. And contemporary scientists have pointed out that there is no such thing anyway as a "pure race." Whether we consider color, stature, facial features, or any other such identifying characteristics, scientific study shows that the races of mankind shade off into one another. Generally anthropology (the branch of science that deals with such matters) divides humanity into the Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Negroid races. This is quite different, however, from our common conception of white, yellow, and black. American Indians, for instance, are actually members of the Mongoloid classification; whereas natives of India (most of them quite dark-skinned) are members of the Caucasian or white race. Science offers no support whatever for fixed lines that we like to draw.

Some perspective in the space dimension will help us, too. The racial problem is not a local one. It is world-wide in its scope. South Africa has hit the headlines frequently with its conflicts among European, Bantu, and "colored" groups, as well as the East Indians who were brought there originally as slaves, much

like the Negroes were brought to the United States. India itself has seen the heated struggle between Moslem and Hindu elements. Here are groups distinguished from each other primarily by their religion. And everywhere around the world today we have the resentment of formerly colonial peoples against the white man. In our own generation we have witnessed the reversal of over three hundred years of domination by Western European nations over the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Such a cataclysmic change could not come about without bitterness and bloodshed, nor without a profound shock to the thinking of formerly dominant white and Western groups.

The American Problem

In America all these problems are reflected. The United States has traditionally been a "melting pot," and this has been true to no small extent of Canada too. As each nationality or ethnic group has come, it has had to start at the bottom of the ladder of American society. No special privileges were granted or asked, but the inherent dynamism of American life, combined with the natural struggle upward of such immigrant groups, has carried each of them in turn to a place of social acceptance and security. Stand in the inner-city area of any of America's great metropolises and you will be able to see (through the lens of history if not by visible evidence) the backwash of successive groups as they passed through the area, calling it home for perhaps a generation but then moving outward, pulled by their own desires to move upward (and this meant outward), and pushed by the more recent arrivals who were moving in.

Each section of America has its own racial or ethnic group problems. In this sense, too, the problem is not a local one.

On the West Coast, for instance, Chinese and Japanese have formed an "alien" group. In the Southwest the Mexicans as well as the Indians have similarly given the population a multiple-group character. In the Northeast anti-Semitism has been a continuing phenomenon. In the South it has been the problem of relations between Negro and white. But this problem has existed in the North too, especially in the Northern cities to which Negroes have steadily emigrated since they were called upon to man the factories during the First World War, a trend intensified during and after the Second World War.

Christian Affirmations

All this background material that has been noted may help to give us perspective, showing that what may seem at times like a private or local or transitory problem is actually a part of a great historic movement that is world-wide in its scope. But what is needed most of all is not the perspective of time or space but the perspective of the Christian faith. What shall be our own attitude as Christians?

Here we can do nothing better than repeat something of the basic point of view which we have developed in the preceding chapters. First, *the Christian regards the created world as good.* As the white man, for example, looks about on the present scene of racial strife, he is tempted to feel that the real source of the trouble is the sheer existence of the other groups. Why did they have to be put on the earth in the first place? Why could the world not have been left for the white people to enjoy? No doubt each group is tempted to feel this way about the others. Yet the very existence of racial differences is a testimony to the fact that the Creator did not intend mankind to be an undif-

ferentiated mass. Not a single color but a kaleidoscope seems to be his intention. The question we must ask ourselves is, will we acknowledge this work of the Creator as good, and accept it as his gift; or will we reject it, despising those who are different from ourselves, even though they too are the Creator's handiwork? The Christian accepts the goodness of the creation—although he does not thereby accept uncritically the inherited social patterns. The latter are not necessarily to be identified with God's original intention.

Secondly, *the Christian lives by the grace of God.* He knows that his life and his redemption are God's gracious gifts. His own righteousness is nothing. All that he is and has he owes to the new life in Christ. What his group, if it be the group that dominates, regards as rights and privileges to be defended at all costs, the Christian considers as expendable. Conversely, the Christian member of a minority group, for all the struggle that may be necessary to obtain such status or such privileges, does not regard them so much as inherent "rights" as divine gifts, in which it is God's own will that all should share.

Self-righteousness is the motif of all racial prejudice and ethnic pride. Christians are those who know they live not as righteous people, but as sinners, united with all men in the commonality of sin. This is the true equality of men: equal and utter dependence on the grace of God.

The third basic affirmation that we may reiterate is that *the Christian looks to God's Spirit for guidance.* Why should there be such great stress on racial justice as a demand of the Christion conscience at this point in history? Is this not something new in Christian history? We do have the precedent of the prominent role played by Christianity in the abolition of slavery

in the nineteenth century, but the New Testament itself does not demand such abolition, though slavery was a prominent institution at the time it was written. Paul in the epistle to Philemon contents himself with calling for an inner transformation of the master-slave relationship. As for the strength and depth of our present convictions, we must simply confess that the Spirit, as Jesus promised, has led us into new truth—new truth in a new historic situation. We see now, if we did not before, that racial discrimination cannot be reconciled with Christian faith. And the Spirit has created a surprising degree of consensus among contemporary Christians on this point. In every corner of the world, and among those of all denominations, the Spirit has borne witness to the church, and the church to the world, that God plays no favorites among his people.

Separation or Integration?

Having said this, there still remains the question of the precise relationship that racial and ethnic groups shall have to one another. As in God's sight all men are equal, so should they be equal before the law, and in their opportunities to share the benefits of modern civilization. On this proposition almost all Christian opinion today would agree. But here a difference emerges, the one viewpoint stressing *equality with separation,* and the other *equality with integration.* It is easy to see that separation corresponds more fully with the natural human desire to avoid those different from ourselves; for with separation prevailing, even if a theoretical equality were granted, we could still secretly retain pride in our own superiority. But it is difficult to see how racial separation can be harmonized with the Christian drive toward fellowship, toward the overcoming of the hostilities

that human sinfulness throws up within the human family that God meant to live as one. At best this kind of separation would be "love at arm's length." But Christian love does not hold others at arm's length; quite the opposite, it puts itself in the neighbor's very shoes. It means full acceptance of him, despite all his faults, just as God accepts us.

Furthermore, over against the "equality with separation" theory we must put the conclusion of the Supreme Court of the United States, in its famous decision of 1954 on the question of public education, that separate facilities are inherently unequal. They imply an unwillingness on the part of the majority group to admit the minority to its privileges, which can only be based on an implicit feeling of superiority. This feeling, the court pointed out, is quickly communicated to the children of the minority group, who, growing up under this stigma, thereby suffer a most severe inequality. Added to this is the natural tendency of the majority group always to let the equality be defined more or less unequally in its favor.

The real question in all the agitation that has followed from this decision of the Supreme Court is not the question of the powers of the Court or the relations between the states and the federal government. It is a question of our understanding of man's nature, and in particular the nature of this man of another race who stands before me. Is he really a *man,* fully God's creature like myself, or is he some lower order of being? For the Christian there can be only one answer. If this man really is a fellowman, then I can only repent that I have not long ago offered my share of this world's goods to help equalize his lot. Certainly it is difficult to overcome long-standing custom, but the power of Christ is stronger than the power of custom. It

may even be true that the educational system for a time will suffer in quality because of integration; if so, perhaps this is only the white man's due recompense for the suffering that he has visited upon his colored brethren.

In all of this, Christian love will be utterly realistic, as is its nature. It will cut through slogans and emotions with rationality and fact. It will not be satisfied with sentimental attitudes, for Christian love is not a sentiment but a profound compassion and a sustained direction of one's activity toward the concrete betterment of the neighbor. Here, if anywhere, the saying holds true that love must express itself in justice. This means for the Christian employer, for instance, not merely that he must say "Good morning" to his Negro janitor, but that he must see to it that the Negro, if his talents permit, has full opportunity to become foreman or office manager. Christian love will recognize, furthermore, that the stubbornness of human sin and pride is such that racial justice will not be achieved without the use of legal processes, the powers of government—and if the law is resisted by force a reply with force. This is love's "strange work"—love expressed as righteous wrath.

The Realm of Reconciliation

On one point there can be no disagreement. This is the basic affirmation that the church itself is meant by God to be the realm of reconciliation among all peoples. In the Christian fellowship there can be neither separation nor discrimination, for it is the very body of Christ. In Christ Jesus, as Paul declared, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one" *(Galatians 3:28)*. Although the church has sometimes reflected the culture

that surrounds it more than the Lord who governs it, in our day there are in every part of the country and the world growing numbers of Christian congregations in whose pews and at whose altars the reconciliation wrought in Christ is visibly expressed.

In many ways the greatest tragedy of the recent years of racial conflict in the United States has been the absence of firm leadership for the constructive forces. Thus the way has been left open for agitators and extremists. By the same token one of the most hopeful signs has been the gradual emergence of the "Christian moderates"—those who, while fully realizing the obstacles in the way, feel that a greater measure of racial justice cannot be indefinitely postponed. Typical of the convictions of this group are these six fundamental principles enunciated in a statement issued by three hundred clergymen of the city of Atlanta, Georgia, in November 1958:

"1. Freedom of speech must at all costs be preserved.

"2. As Americans and as religious leaders we have an obligation to obey the law.

"3. The public school system must not be destroyed.

"4. Hatred and scorn for those of another race, or for those who hold a position different from our own, can never be justified.

"5. Communication between responsible leaders of the races must be maintained.

"6. Our difficulties cannot be solved in our own strength or in human wisdom, but only through prayer and in obedience to the will of God." *

The extent and depth of such convictions among the people of

* Quoted in *New York Times*, November 23, 1958.

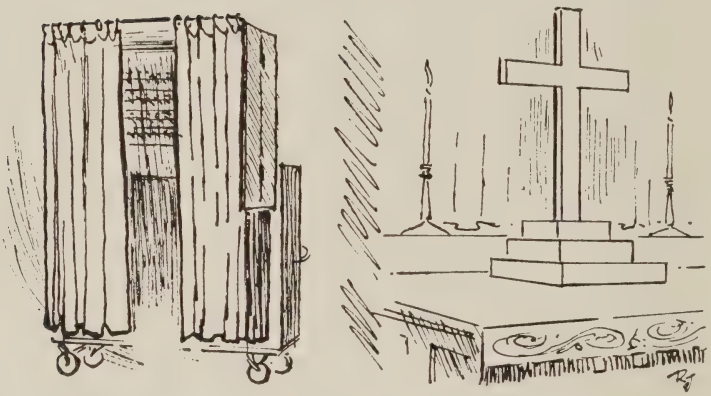
both races provide the surest hope for the constructive solution of the present conflict.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you feel that race relations in this country are better or worse than they were ten years ago? What facts substantiate your viewpoint?
2. What are some of the manifestation of the racial problem in your own community?
3. Are both whites and Negroes employed where you work? How do they get along?
4. Do you agree that the fact that there are several races "is a good aspect" of the creation?
5. What Christian truth places all races and ethnic groups on the same level?
6. Is "equality with separation" a Christian solution of the race problem?
7. Can the existence of separate congregations for Negroes be justified? How about separate Negro denominations?
8. What can Christian people do to help solve the race problem?

8

The Christian in Politics



Should they be joined, or separated?

"RELIGION AND POLITICS don't mix" is a common American saying, just like the saying, "Alcohol and gasoline don't mix." You can try to mix them, but the results will be disastrous. If you drive, don't drink; if you drink, don't drive. If you get into politics, forget about religion. If you want to keep your religion, don't get into politics.

Church Membership

There is some legitimacy to this idea of a distinction between the two areas. For one thing it is a good idea insofar as it re-

minds us not to judge political candidates simply by their church membership. In many sections of the United States political slate-makers have been careful to present to voters what they called a "balanced ticket," i.e., one that would represent the Protestants and the Catholics, the Italians and the Swedes, with perhaps a token candidacy for the Negroes or the Jews. This idea is fast disappearing in favor of the presentation of candidates who pledge themselves to represent all the people and who ask to be judged only on their abilities. After all, will a Baptist be a better dog-catcher, or a better governor, just because he is a Baptist? For a religious group to judge candidates on the basis of whether he is "one of us" is to reduce the group in question to the status of a sort of mutual protective league.

This does not mean that it is not legitimate to take into consideration a candidate's religious orientation. If a Christian Scientist were to run for the office of commissioner of health it would be relevant to ask whether he accepts the Christian Scientist point of view with respect to illness and disease. If a Roman Catholic were to run for president it would not be improper to expect from him a statement as to how he understands the relationship between political and ecclesiastical power. But Protestants must be prepared to honor the sincerity of such a statement. In most cases religious identification will prove to be far less important than the personal ability of the candidate and his position on crucial issues involved in the election.

Separation of Church and State

American tradition insists on separation of church and state. But we should be clear about what this means. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States says, "Congress

shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Essentially this means, negatively, that there shall be in the United States no "established church"—no church which is defined as the vehicle of the state religion and which is granted special privileges. Positively, it means that freedom of religious belief and practice shall be guaranteed to all. Let us note, however, that the principle of an established church is in no way basically contrary to the nature of Christianity. Lutheranism has historically held this position in Germany and Scandinavia. Anglicanism has played a similar role in England. In America several of the original colonies recognized Congregationalism as the established church. In all of these cases, however, the adherents of the group in question constituted the great majority, or even the entirety of the population of the area. In the United States, where we were recipients of constant streams of immigration from the most diverse sources, the dominance of one denomination, or even of Protestantism as a whole, soon came to an end. American Protestantism has come to feel especially congenial to the principle of religious equality before the law, and is dedicated to defending it.

An Arena for Faith's Expression

The formal separation of church and state as institutions, however, does not imply a divorce between government and religion as a motivating force. We can see everywhere in public life evidences of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas' assertion, "We are a religious people." The provision of chaplains in the armed forces, the offering of prayers in the House and Senate and at political conventions, the swearing of oaths upon the Scriptures in our courts, the addition of the phrase "under God"

to the pledge of allegiance to the flag—all these are clear evidence of the strain of religious affirmation running through our public life. Beyond these rather formal considerations there is the fact that religious values are not excluded from the basic decisions that are made as public servants go about their tasks. Basic convictions about man's nature and destiny, derived from faith, are brought into the political arena, there to be tested for their relevance and adequacy in competition with other views.

Christian faith, by its very nature, demands the carrying of its convictions into the realm of politics. For faith, as we have seen, is an orientation of the total life; it is a relation to God, the Creator and Redeemer of man's total life, including politics. Indeed, politics is one of the most important areas for faith's expression; for here is where the large-scale decisions affecting human society are made, and these dare not be faithless decisions. Like every other aspect of existence, politics is streaked with sin. But it is not to be despised on this account. Here, too, the Christian will be found at work for human welfare, relying always on divine forgiveness.

The Christian Contribution

But what special contribution is the Christian able to bring to politics? It is clear that his faith does not provide him with ready-made answers to political questions; it will not tell him whom or what to vote for. But it will provide him with certain basic guidelines which give him a helpful orientation in working toward specific policy.

The first contribution of Christian faith lies in its unique combination of *idealism and realism.* On the one hand, the Christian is idealistic. His estimate of man's capacities is high,

for he views man as made in the image of God. The dignity that this involves provides the basis for the Christian's protest against conditions that degrade the human personality, while the freedom and responsibility that this image also implies give the Christian grounds for hope that man can be awakened to concern for his fellowman. The Christian will never look askance at proposals for social and political improvement. Indeed, he will be among those most sensitive to changing human needs in a changing world, which make necessary new political approaches. On the other hand the Christian is realistic. He knows not only man's capacities but also his limitations, and is aware of the persistence of sin even among the saints. This means he will be wary of too great a claim for what can be achieved by politics.

Political life in America seems to swing between extremes of apathy and excitement. Most people take little interest in politics except at times of national elections. They follow politics at a distance by reading the headlines of the newspapers, thus being treated to a diet of the sensational more than the significant. Meanwhile politics is left to the professionals, who frequently are persons whose concept of their responsibilities is limited, to say the least. Then, from time to time, great reform movements arise to set things straight, but frequently they peter out after an initial burst of enthusiasm. The Christian will be ready to lend a hand when the moment for some spectacular social advance seems to have come, but he will be more concerned with the steady, day-by-day processes of government which are less dramatic but probably more significant in the long run.

The Christian will be wary of vague pronouncements of political ideals; he will look for concrete achievements. And he will be on his guard against the all too common use of the

terminology of religion and morality to disguise programs built to advance personal interests, either by those who would defend or those who would change the status quo.

The thought is sometimes expressed that what is wrong with politics is that those who are in it are there for selfish purposes. One is almost led to believe this is true when he observes the various groups that try to make their influence felt—business, labor, farmers, etc.—each in order to advance his own particular interests. Morally this may be regrettable, but it is a part of Christian realism to recognize that since human nature is what it is, this self-interested character of political pursuits can never wholly be eliminated. In fact, it could be said that the very purpose of politics is to provide an arena in which the conflicting claims arising from the self-interest of various groups can be peacefully adjudicated. The problem is to provide a governmental framework and a set of political procedures most conducive to such adjudication.

From another standpoint, however, there is a "public interest" that transcends the interests of special groups, and it is a part of the responsibility of Christians working within the business or labor or farm constituencies to try continually to interpret the interest of the part in the light of the interest of the whole. Self-restraint in this respect is usually the best way of preventing harsh punitive action where a swing of the pendulum brings another group into political control.

The second broad contribution of Christian faith is the dual *concern for the individual and the community* that, like the combination of idealism and realism, is involved in its fundamental view of man. The individual is precious in the sight of God, and he must therefore be held precious in the society of man. The

Christian is concerned for human freedom in a comprehensive sense: freedom of speech, freedom of action, freedom of association, freedom of economic opportunity. What the philosophies that stress the freedom of the individual often overlook, however, is the extent to which, in our complicated society, collective action may be necessary for the very sake of individual welfare. Most individuals cannot afford to maintain a fire engine in their own garages. Fire-fighting must be a community affair. Similarly no individual can do very much about the waves of unemployment that sweep the American economy from time to time, or about runaway inflation or depression; there must be some kind of central economic planning or control. Such controls—for instance the regulation of the supply of money and the adjustment of the rate of interest by the federal reserve banks—have been accepted as necessary to some extent by both major political parties in this country. Part of the genius of the American way in economics has been its ability to combine elements of freedom and control, resulting in a "mixed economy" rather than one devoted to either extreme of individualism or collectivism.

The final contribution of the Christian faith in the political arena is its stress upon the *reconciliation of those holding divergent viewpoints.* Sharp verbal clashes are to be expected when political battles are being fought, and devoted Christians may themselves be poles apart in their judgments on concrete issues and personalities. But from faith's perspective one realizes the limitations not only of the other fellow's viewpoint but of one's own. God's judgment and his gracious providence overarches all political positions. It is this conviction which, even in the heat of political antagonisms, forestalls a final rupture in the life of the community. The rule of the majority has rightly been con-

sidered fundamental to democracy; but equally fundamental are the rights of the minority. The Christian insistence that final truth rests with no man, but with God alone, produces a spirit of self-criticism and self-limitation that is a powerful bulwark of these rights.

Nothing that has been said, however, about the Christian's "intermediate" view of man or about his stress on reconciliation should be taken to imply a position of neutrality on his part. When all is said and done the Christian must take his stand one way or the other; he must vote yes or no. In a day when unconcern about public issues is altogether too widespread, the Christian will evidence the courage to care, even though he knows that he cannot rely upon the absolute correctness of his own position but must depend upon God's forgiveness.

Ways to Influence Politics

Practically speaking, there are three principal ways in which the Christian citizen can make his influence felt in political affairs, in addition to the exercise of his right to vote. The first and most fundamental is by working in one or another of the political parties. It is largely through the parties that the work of politics is carried on. It is rare indeed when a genuine "independent" meets with success in an election. It is within the parties, moreover, that the essential preliminary debate about divergent viewpoints is carried on and a realistic program that represents at least a partial national consensus is hammered out. The second channel for the Christian citizen's political expression is to help create that nebulous but potent phenomenon called "public opinion." Letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines and to one's congressman, speeches and discussion at serv-

ice clubs, even dinner-table conversations have a part in creating a public mood which is articulate and informed and which becomes a basic factor in determining the viewpoint of those who have responsibility for making public policy. The third channel for the Christian citizen's political expression is provided by the many voluntary associations that have been formed and are continually being formed either to promote political discussion in general or to advance particular points of view (League of Women Voters, neighborhood improvement councils, and the like). In addition, groups to which the individual belongs primarily for other purposes, such as labor unions or businessmen's associations, may prove to have political significance. Thus in many and various ways the perspective of Christian faith can be brought to bear upon the decisions of vast human import that are continually being made in the political arena.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. To what extent should you take into account the religion of a candidate when deciding whether to support him?
2. Is there any danger of one religious group gaining an overly dominant position in this country? If so, what should be done about it?
3. What is meant by "separation of church and state"?
4. How would you answer someone who opposed the appointment of chaplains to the U.S. House and Senate and the saying of prayers at the opening of sessions on the grounds that this violated the separation of church and state?
5. Should religion be taught in the public schools?
6. Give examples of some men and women in public office whom you consider to be making an outstanding contribution to the common welfare.
7. Do you feel that politics is an honorable career to recommend to a Christian young person? Why, or why not?
8. What are the contributions that Christian faith should make to politics?

9

Peace or War?

Swords or plowshares?

"THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES, and their spears into pruning hooks" *(Isaiah 2:4).* Probably no biblical promise has found more of an echo in the hearts of men than this. Death and destruction by war is one of mankind's most ancient scourges.

Without Limitations or Barriers

In our own generation this age-old dream has taken on new poignancy, as the threat of war has reached hitherto unknown dimensions. Two concurrent developments comprise this threat. The one is the spread of war to a world-wide scope. A conflict

anywhere on earth affects all nations. The second development is the invention of weapons of mass annihilation. The atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945 seemed utterly destructive, yet now it has been superseded by bombs whose killing power exceeds it a thousandfold, and by missiles able to deliver such a bomb to any spot on earth. Thus all barriers and limitations of war have been broken.

The Christian citizen is likely to feel completely baffled by this problem. He does not know where decisions that determine war or peace are made, but he knows they are not made by him. The temptation is to adopt a fatalistic attitude, to resign to the thought that if destruction is going to come it will come, and better that it come instantaneously than gradually. Meanwhile let us seek what pleasure we can in our own private lives.

It is true that in matters of war and international diplomacy decisions are made at the highest level, and often in secrecy. Yet public opinion does have some effect on the decisions of the leaders. The nature of the public's thinking about war and peace will determine which set of leaders presented to them at election time they will support. Although there has been a great deal of talk about a "bipartisan" foreign policy, the views of the major parties and their leaders on questions of foreign affairs have become increasingly distinct from one another.

Viewpoints on War

Traditionally two viewpoints on the subject of war have been found among Christians. The one, generally called pacifism, has maintained that Christian participation in or support of warfare is unthinkable. We have the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill," and, moreover, Jesus' word, "Do not resist one who is evil"

(Matthew 5:39). The Christian way is the way of love. The Christian therefore will refuse to serve in the armed forces, at least as a combatant, and he will oppose all measures designed to provide armaments.

The other historical Christian position acknowledges the sincerity of the pacifists' witness but declares it to be a dangerously oversimplified interpretation of Jesus' words and the actual situation in which we have to make such decisions. Jesus was speaking to his "little flock" of disciples who had been called out of their regular stations in life to be his appointed messengers. He was not laying down a rule for all time. The problem, moreover, is really not whether I should defend myself as an individual; it is a question of the *common defense.* It is a question of whether I will take up arms to defend my wife and family, my fellow citizens and their wives and families, our whole society and culture and cherished institutions. This the Christian may and must do as part of his responsibility to fellowmen.

Note that we have spoken of *defense.* Aggressive warfare is another matter. The problem is a subtle one, however, and the conscientious Christian could conceivably be found supporting a small-scale aggression (such as the British-French-Israeli action in the Suez area in November, 1956) as part of an over-all defense (the defense of the Western position against an expansive pan-Arabism). As always, the ethical judgment must be made in light of the specific situation.

There are some who maintain that the development of nuclear weapons has so radically changed the situation that the nonpacifist Christian argument is no longer relevant. The reply to this is that the power of destruction, and therefore the urgency of preventing war, has certainly increased, but the underlying

factors in the human situation that either foster or forestall war have not been altered. Such factors as human pride, overenthusiastic patriotism, isolationism or aggressive nationalism, the greed for power that afflicts not only those who have little power but also those who already have much—such factors still remain and must be dealt with. Limitation or reduction of armaments, if universal rather than unilateral, surely worth striving for; but will not in itself solve the broad underlying problems, nor will it magically wipe out of existence the specific social movements that arise to threaten peace. The new technological developments make such aggressive movements all the more dangerous. Luther's saying still holds good:

"If all the world were composed of real Christians, that is, true believers, no prince, king, lord, sword, or law would be needed. . . . Christians, however, are few and far between, as the saying is. . . . Hence a man who would venture to govern an entire country or the world with the Gospel would be like a shepherd who should place in one fold wolves, lions, eagles, and sheep together and let them freely mingle with one another and say, Help yourselves, and be good and peaceful among yourselves, the fold is open, there is plenty of food; have no fear of dogs and clubs. The sheep, forsooth, would keep the peace and would allow themselves to be fed and governed in peace, but they would not live long; nor would any beast keep from molesting another." *

Contribution to Peace

But if Christianity does not mean pacifism, if it sanctions participation in defense activities and even war if necessary, does it make any positive contribution to peace? That it does, and in

* *Works of Martin Luther,* Philadelphia Edition (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932), Vol. III, pp. 234, 237.

several ways. In the first place, the Christian's "faith active in love" gives him a concern and understanding for those problems that lead to international strife. Such strife arises not only from unwarranted greed for goods and power but often from interests that in themselves are quite legitimate—the quest for national independence, for land to feed hungry people, for a more just form of government, for accessibility to needed resources. These interests may happen to clash with the interests of our own or other nations. True Christian faith gives us sympathy for the anxieties and needs of others. This ability to envision both sides of an issue fosters a greater willingness to negotiate conflicts, and if necessary sacrifice some of our own national interests for the sake of building a just world order and hence maintaining peace. The policy of certain Western nations in granting independence to former colonies and actively assisting them to overcome their lag in agricultural and industrial development is an example of a constructive policy which in the long run brings benefits to all.

Secondly, and closely connected with the first point, Christian faith helps us to see that our own national interests are just that, *interests*—whether we are seeking oil in the Middle East, or friendly territory in Western Europe, or a line of military bastions in the Pacific. We suffer from the perennial human tendency to cloak such matters of self-interest in the garb of high-sounding altruistic goals. The Christian faith gives us a standpoint from which we are able to recognize our own self-interest and sinfulness. Recognizing these, we may gain a humility that will make us less intransigent in international affairs.

Sic!

It is widely supposed that Christianity would imply, if it were taken seriously, a more "moral" approach to foreign affairs. As a matter of fact our foreign policy is in many respects too moral

already. We have a world-wide reputation for self-righteousness. Our reiterated claim to be acting only from the highest motives and for the cause of freedom has probably done more to alienate the rest of the world than any open avowal of self-interested aims would do. Christian faith teaches us to tone down the proclamation of our own morality and tune up our sensitiveness to how other nations see the situation.

Thus Christianity gives us the courage to be self-critical. It is not easy, especially in times of tension, to suggest that our own nation's course of action may have been wrong. It is much more popular to blame someone else for all the world's problems. But those who through Christian faith have some point of reference above and beyond our nation's interests, and indeed beyond the whole present world situation, will have the courage for continual self-scrutiny.

The World Problem

To look more closely at the contemporary world scene, however, what is the problem that it presents? There are many and varying analyses. Some take quite an optimistic view and feel that the problem of international relationships is essentially one of communication. If only the leaders of the world could sit down together and work out their differences like gentlemen all would be well. But would it? Without disparaging the necessary processes of diplomatic negotiations, we may point out that international conferences at even the highest levels have evidenced no miraculous power to eliminate world tensions.

International relations are relations between nations, and blocs of nations. The problems are social, economic, political, military—not personal, and they do not melt away even in the

face of the greatest personal cordiality among the leaders. A broad program of exchange of students, artists, farmers, and the like among rival nations would be valuable, but it too would be no panacea. Likewise the United Nations, together with its subsidiary and associated organizations such as the World Health Organization, have proved to be of considerable value. The Security Council and the General Assembly have provided a forum for international communication. But communication is no cure-all. Experience has shown that no nation, if it can help it, is going to submit major decisions to an organization whose majority it considers antagonistic to its own interests. Thus the United Nations has often been bypassed in favor of direct negotiations among the powers concerned. This shows how unrealistic is the proposal to "establish world government now."

In opposition to those who rather optimistically regard the world problem as one of communication are the people who regard it as a gigantic conspiracy against us, a conspiracy called Communism. It is true that Communism as an international movement is dedicated to the goal of seizing power in all nations. But it is far more than a conspiracy such as might be organized by a group of hoodlums bent on wreaking vengeance on established authority. Communism has a positive as well as a negative dynamic. It is a movement which has gained the allegiance of hundreds of millions of people, whether by coercion or consent, and we would do well to try to understand its various facets.

Communism is, in the first place, a *system of ideas.* It is a philosophy offering its own interpretation of the nature of reality, government, economic life, social change—all summed up in the term "dialectical materialism." Communism, in fact, is more than a philosophy; it is a religion, offering an orientation to the

whole of existence, and providing its own creeds, saints, and ceremonies. Ancient tribal religions and otherworldly faiths are breaking down in many areas of the earth. Communism furnishes an alternative. At this level, obviously, it cannot be combatted by military means. It can be answered only by a faith that will appeal to men as equally relevant to their needs and infinitely more humane in its prescription for meeting them.

Communism, secondly, is a *program of revolution.* Again, in many areas of the world, the social situation has been ripe for revolution. Oppressed classes have been ready for revolt against their overlords; colonial peoples have been struggling to cast off imperialist control. Communism has stepped into the vacuum to offer a tried and tested program of revolutionary action. It can be answered only by an equally vigorous but less destructive effort to root out social injustice and discrimination.

Thirdly, Communism comes today, particularly to the people of Asia and Africa, as the *bearer of advanced technology.* Russian achievements in nuclear science and in launching intercontinental and interplanetary missiles have powerfully impressed technologically underdeveloped nations of the world, and the mighty effort at industrialization presently being made in China is likewise being closely watched. Unless Western nations, which originally were the promoters of modern science, put forth redoubled effort they are likely to lose to the Eastern block the technological leadership which may be the decisive element in world-wide power.

Communism, finally, is a *form of social organization.* It calls for complete subordination of the individual, his rights, and his economic enterprise to the demands of the community. Here is one of the great strengths of Communism, for this form of social

organization enables it to marshal its total resources at selected points without regard for the wishes of the individuals involved. But in another respect this is Communism's greatest weakness. The human spirit will not endure indefinitely the crushing of its freedom as a result of the complete socialization and bureaucratization of life. Man is made for community, but he is not made to be ground down to an indistinguishable unit in collectivity. The Hungarian revolt of 1956 and the novel *Doctor Zhivago,* produced within the Soviet Union itself, are but two instances of the continual burning of the flame of freedom even in unlikely places. This flame has burned with special brilliance in the lives of those modern Christian martyrs who in God's name have courageously resisted Communism and other species of totalitarian regimes which our troubled era has brought forth.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you think that it is likely that there will be another world war? If so, what would be its effects?

2. What noteworthy contributions do you feel the churches have made to international peace? What more could they do?

3. Can a Christian in good conscience serve in the armed forces? How can he justify doing so in view of Jesus' command, "Do not resist one who is evil"?

4. Can a Christian serve in good conscience as a nuclear physicist working on the development of more powerful atomic bombs?

5. How valuable an instrument is the United Nations for the maintenance of peace? Give some examples of its success or failure.

6. Do you think that world government can be achieved in our generation. Why, or why not?

7. Discuss the assertion in the text that our foreign policy is often too moral rather than not moral enough.

8. Discuss the adequacy of the fourfold definition of Communism given in the text.

10

Withdrawal and Return

A twofold rhythm

THERE IS A TWOFOLD RHYTHM in the Christian life. Just as Jesus found it necessary to go apart to pray but always returned to his service among the multitudes, so it is with the Christian. His relation to the world is a repeated rhythm of withdrawal and return. If he is to serve effectively, he must have a firm standing-ground, a source of courage that is adequate to all the anxieties that a troubled time may bring. But he cannot remain forever in the sanctuary. He must go forth, impelled by love, to serve his God in the arena of common life. It is there that the cross awaits him that his Lord bids him to take up.

A Creative Minority

Arnold Toynbee, in his study of the great civilizations of the world, to which we have already referred, has made the observation that civilizations do not generally advance on a broad front, with all the ranks moving forward simultaneously. Rather, they advance by means of a forward thrust by what Toynbee calls a "creative minority," a subgroup within the culture which blazes the path that the majority later follows. The strategy of such a creative minority, like that of creative individuals, is one of withdrawal and return. It is by virtue of a certain dissociation from society that the creative minority develops to the point where it can serve as the exemplar of society.

Is not this a remarkably apt description of the role of the church in relation to the life of the civilization in whose midst it dwells? The church is meant to be God's creative minority! God's strategy is that of choosing a special people for himself, to whom his grace is most intimately to be made known, and who are to be his designated instrument for the realization of his purposes within the world. Under the old covenant this chosen people was Israel; under the new covenant it is the new Israel, the church. From among all the nations of the world God chooses his own. They are to be his "fifth column" as it were, working continually from within toward the transformation of human culture. As the writer of the Epistle to Diognetus observed already in the second century, "What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world."

God's Fifth Column

Can we indicate more precisely how the church is to carry out this vitally important social ministry? If we speak of a "minis-

try," we must first understand who are the church's ministers. Often we think only of the clergy. But it was one of the most basic insights of the Protestant Reformation that *every* Christian is a minister. This is the real meaning of the well-known doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers." It means not so much the right of every man to be a priest for himself, but the responsibility of every man to be a priest for his neighbor. Every Christian is to be an evangelist; all are to exercise their stewardship; all have a share in the church's social ministry.

What is the image that the word "church" brings to our minds? It may be the image of a house of worship, or the image of a clergyman. In either case we think of the church as set apart from the world. But the most fundamental meaning of "the church" is *the whole company of Christian people.* It is the "communion of saints," and according to the New Testament every believer is a saint. If we think of the church in these terms, we see that it is not separated from the world, but deeply interpenetrates it. Especially is this true in a land such as our own, where the great majority of the people claim church membership.

The church, then, already has its fifth column in the world, in the persons of the Christian laity. The problem is not so much to bring church and world together as to bring Christians who already occupy their stations as bakers, bankers, or bus drivers to a realization of what it means to act *as* Christians in their daily work. For Christian vocation means, as we have seen, not only the acceptance of an occupation as a Christian calling, but also the effort to transform it from within. What does it mean to be a Christian doctor, lawyer, teacher, farmer, salesman, or machinist? Increasingly, opportunities are being provided through

retreats and conferences for Christians to sit down with others of the same calling and talk out the meaning of Christian faith and ethics for their line of work. Here if anywhere, we need that "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren" which Luther considered one of the principal means of grace (Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV).

Christian laity can also serve as God's fifth column in the world by fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens. This we have discussed at some length in the chapter on politics. The problems range all the way from those of the local school board to those of the United Nations. Keeping informed on current issues so as to help create an intelligent public opinion, voting and working in political organizations, perhaps running for office himself —all these activities, when directed toward "the common welfare," constitute a part of the Christian's social ministry. In this sphere as well as in his occupation, he usually will work side by side with many who do not share his faith. If he is able by virtue of his faith to bring to the common task some special impetus or insight, this will serve as a quiet but powerful witness for Christ.

The Church's Social Ministry

Besides its existence in the form of members distributed throughout society, the church also exists as a distinct institution with special functions. What are the facets of its social ministry in this more particular sense? First and foremost is its *ministry of prayer.* Throughout all ages the church has prayed for guidance for itself and society, and its prayers have secretly sustained the world. In the case of personal needs we have the boldness to approach God with petitions couched in quite concrete terms.

We pray for the recovery of a particular person from a particular illness. Should not our prayers with reference to the life of the community be equally concrete? This means praying not only for God's blessing in general, but presenting to him the particular social issues which press upon us at any given time, whether it be a crisis in international affairs, a conflict of unusual severity in labor-management relations, an outbreak of crime and violence, or the less dramatic needs of relief from the monotony of daily work, guidance in family life, or a deepened sense of responsibility among the citizenry.

The second aspect of the church's social ministry is the *ministry of the Word.* Preaching that addresses itself with any degree of specificity to social issues is bound to be controversial. But the church's preaching at its best has always been disturbing. Neither the prophets nor the apostles were soft-spoken, and our Lord himself proved to be "a sign that is spoken against" *(Luke 2:34).* "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you," he warned, "for so their fathers did to the false prophets" *(Luke 6:26).* This task of articulating the Word of God in such manner as to reveal its cutting edge with respect to social issues is a responsibility that perhaps falls most heavily on the shoulders of those who are specially set apart as preachers of the Word. But the laity has the responsibility not only to permit but to expect this type of preaching. And further, the Christian layman is called to search the Scriptures for himself, seeking to discern its meaning for the concrete issues of our present life.

Thirdly, the church is called to *embody in its own life* the restoration of human dignity and human community which it declares to be God's will for his creation. We have tried to show how Christian love implies both the fulfilment of the individual

as such, and his involvement in relationships of mutuality. The church in its own life embodies this bipolar emphasis. In the church the individual is precious, and here he can find acceptance, no matter how personally unattractive he may be or how much an outcast because of his class or race. His acceptance means incorporation into the community of Christian love, a community in which we can know each other deeply, not merely by a nodding acquaintance as is often the case in our daily lives.

How beautifully the church's sacraments, which are the basis of its origin and its continuance, express this bipolar character. In baptism the infant or adult comes before God as a distinct, unique individual, is named with a personal name, and receives forgiveness and new birth for his own individual life. But at the same time he is incorporated into the Christian community, he becomes a living member of the body of Christ. Similarly with the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In one sense a man is never so alone before God as when he stands before the altar to receive the bread and wine and the assurance of God's forgiveness. In another sense the church is never so deeply united as a community as it is during the celebration of this same sacrament.

Fourthly, there is the church's *ministry of mercy*. Here is the Christian community taking up its age-old and yet ever necessary task to care for widows and orphans in their affliction, to bind up the broken-hearted and to comfort those who mourn. New problems arise and new strategies are called for. In our time it may not be the orphan but the child who is the innocent victim of a divorce who needs our help; it may not be the man who is physically hungry but the one who out of spiritual hunger has become an alcoholic. This ministry of mercy will always be needed, for there will never be a society so well-organized that

there will no longer be individuals who fall wounded by the wayside. Even if government increasingly assumes this work of social welfare, Christians will still find ways for a direct expression of that very personal concern for others to which their faith impels them.

Too often we have tended to pass off this ministry of mercy completely to the many special agencies created for the purpose —homes for the aged, child-care institutions and the like. In reality, it is a responsibility which rests upon every Christian congregation. In every neighborhood, there are "the last, the least, the lost" who need our love. Paradoxically, we have seen during the past several generations a tendency on the part of congregations, situated in the very areas of greatest need in this respect, to flee those areas in search of a more "suitable" environment. Hundreds of Protestant congregations have forsaken the inner areas of our great cities for the suburbs. Fortunately, this trend now seems to have been reversed.

What is involved here is our whole conception of the church. If it is merely a collection of individuals pursuing their own spiritual welfare, then it has little reason for a positive concern with the neighborhood surrounding the church edifice. But if the church is a fellowship not only of the redeemed, but of those commissioned to carry the redemptive message of the Gospel into the common life of man, then the church's own neighborhood provides its first field of action. This means concern for persons; it means, too, concern for the character of the community as such. Adequate housing, playgrounds, schools, and honest politics should be high on the Christian agenda in such urban areas. The same holds true for rural, small town, and suburban churches in relation to their own communities.

The final aspect of the church's social ministry is what we may call the *ministry of public testimony*. By this we mean the church's right and duty to formulate pronouncements on the major social issues of the day. Such pronouncements may be broad statements on fundamental problems, such as race relations or world peace. They may, on the other hand, be designed to call attention to rather specific abuses, or to endorse rather specific proposals for their amelioration. The church cannot, in the nature of things, provide a detailed program for the social order. What it can and must do is to lift up a crucial issue and, by virtue of prayer and study and discussion, illuminate its ethical dimensions, and if possible point toward a resolution. In so doing, the church (or whichever of its boards or agencies are involved) will want to avail itself of expert counsel, and to draw upon the insights of those who have dealt with the problem in a practical way. This means consulting doctors (and wives!) on the question of birth control, economists on economic policy, politicians on political affairs, etc. Pronouncements formulated by committees of clergymen alone would have far less cogency.

Here we are dealing, for the most part, with matters that transcend the purview of the local congregation. The principle involved, however, is similar. Just as the congregation is responsible for its neighborhood, so the church gathered at any other level, whether that of town or city, state or region, nation or community of nations, concerns itself with the moral and social issues that arise at that level. The world church conferences of recent years have provided inspiring examples of relevant witness on problems that confront man universally today.

Pronouncements of this kind do not, of course, have binding power on the individual believer. His own conscience, under God,

must finally determine his position on such issues. But if he really believes that it is the Holy Spirit that "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" the church, then he will give a most respectful hearing to a statement of the consensus of his Christian brethren. We are presupposing that the making of such statements is part of a total process of study and discussion of social issues throughout the church, including its organizations for men, women, and youth. We are presupposing, too, a scrupulous respect for the position of the minority on any issue.

Here again, we are moving in the realm of matters that are controversial, and will remain so. But unless we wish to convert Christianity into a tranquilizer, we will not shrink from our social responsibility for fear of controversy. The church draws courage from her Lord, who cared for man enough to die for him. However often she withdraws for worship, she returns to serve; for the God she worships is the Creator and Redeemer of the whole of life.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the church? How would you define it?

2. Does the idea of a conference of Christians who are engaged in your particular occupation appeal to you?

3. What is your attitude toward sermons on social issues? Toward references to social issues in sermons dealing mainly with another subject?

4. In what ways may the church "embody in its own life the restoration of human dignity and human community"?

5. What are the greatest personal and social needs in your own neighborhood?

6. Is a congregation justified in moving if it is faced with the entry of a different racial group into its neighborhood?

7. What, at the present time, are the most crucial moral issues on which the church should try to offer public testimony?

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